Film Quarterly

Volume 45
Number 3
Spring 1992

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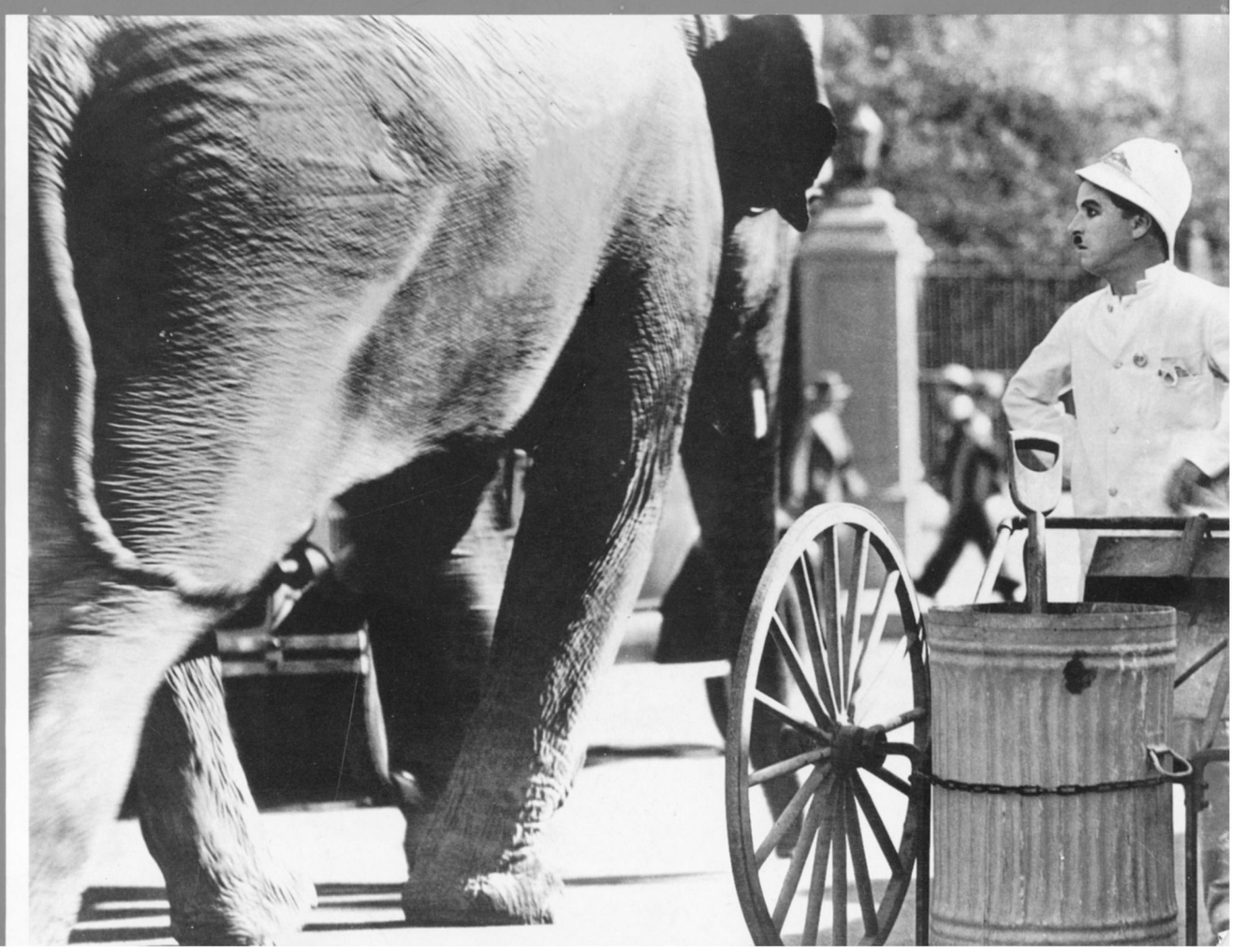
William Greaves: the African-American Experience •
Chaplin's Impure Comedy • *High Heels* • *Daddy*
Nostalgia • *Life Is Sweet* and Mike Leigh • Books •



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Karen Jaehne

David Cronenberg on William Burroughs

Dead Ringers Do *Naked Lunch*

It is hard to imagine two people more allied by phantasmagoric visions than David Cronenberg and William Burroughs. Both men are attracted to the shiny metallic but mercurial intellectual vein in their subject matter, even though at first blush their imagery is often grotesque, visceral, and unnerving. Plot is always secondary. In *Naked Lunch*, Cronenberg uses Burroughs' life and art as a reason to explore the writer as addict. The film is a nightmare set in Interzone (the International Zone of Tangier, a sort of Berlin of North Africa), where typewriters talk when they're not turning into giant insects, and life, like writing, is boring or repulsive.

Interview

KAREN JAEHNE: *Let's start with the critical crux: Is this a David Cronenberg film, the subject of which happens to be William Burroughs, or is this the film about Burroughs and his novel* Naked Lunch *that was inevitable and only happened to be made by Cronenberg?*

DAVID CRONENBERG: It probably has more of me in it than of William Burroughs, because he had very little to do with the process. I never set out to make an historical or quasi-historical account, or to be faithful to the source. I think of it as the product of a dream I would have about Burroughs and his book, a dream to which I bring all my particular obsessions and idiosyncrasies.

What impact did William Burroughs have on the film-making?

Bill had nothing to do with the writing or the directing or the film. He told me that he had once tried to write a script—the memoirs of Dutch Schultz, I believe—and he said this is an entirely different art form, you can save it for the professionals.

And perhaps because the film is about writing and, very specifically, about Burroughs as a writer and an intellect, he had the good grace to stay out of the process. He was very liberal, very intelligent about it and basically told me to go make my movie. As it happens, he likes the result, which pleases me, but that was not my aim either. I wanted to be as honest and interesting as I could about the intellectual makeup of "Bill Lee," the alter ego of William Burroughs during the time he wrote *Naked Lunch*.

Were you ever worried about going too far out on a limb about his experiences or experiments?

Would they come to me if they wanted the kind of discretion you're suggesting? Many of the issues raised by *Naked Lunch*—homosexuality, misogyny, drug use, obscenity and censorship—are still controversial in America today. You have no choice but to face them head on, as bluntly and

In Interzone: Peter Weller as William Lee

as crudely as you find in his writing, if you want this film to have any credibility whatsoever. And I'm not sure an American director could approach it in the same way. American culture is not introspective. It's at a white heat and boiling, and I like it, but as a Canadian I'm also in exile from American culture. I can't help but consume it, but I have choices that Americans might not have.

I think in some way it took a Canadian director and an English producer to deal with Burroughs and his world. Not because we are superior, but only because we share an arm's length perspective on the really controversial elements that needs to be preserved. The misogyny alone . . .

What about Burroughs', or Bill Lee's, relationship with the representational woman in this picture—who is played by Judy Davis first as Joan, Burroughs' wife whom he murdered in Mexico, then as Jane Bowles, whom he knew when he was living in Tangier?

Murder is not an appropriate term here. I don't think it was a murder, legally speaking, although he did kill her and felt pain and guilt about it. There were undoubtedly a lot of things at work—jealousy, which I try to allude to in the scene in which he walks in on her with another man. . . .

But that is a famous incident usually portrayed as a paradigm of "Beat" hipness—the lack of jealousy, the idea of tolerance of people acting out their desires despite bourgeois norms.

Maybe, but jealousy is a very important emotion, even when it is repressed. Burroughs loved Joan, admired her, and thought of her as an equal. There is nothing misogynistic about Burroughs' work, and I realize that it's a twisted element of his psychological makeup, but you have to get beyond the surface. His work represents the essence of struggling with misogyny without fear of the dark side. The incident represented in the film as the occasion of Joan's death is the central experience of his life, you see.

"Let's do our William Tell routine." They were out of their minds, and he says he doesn't know why he did it. He also worries about something in her that was self-destructive. . . .

He has said he suspected her brain pulled the bullet to it.

Which is another way of expressing his awareness of her self-destructive state. You see, Bur-

roughs believes in things like possession in a medieval sense and in things that I don't endorse.

Yes, he thought at one time that women were from another planet.

No, he thought they were a different species—a very different thing from being alien. This is not scientific thinking; this is mythological or a kind of primitive poetry. That women and men are "other" is a commonplace, but Bill extended that to an extreme I may find interesting but cannot take literally.

How are we to take Bill's killing Joan in the film—twice?

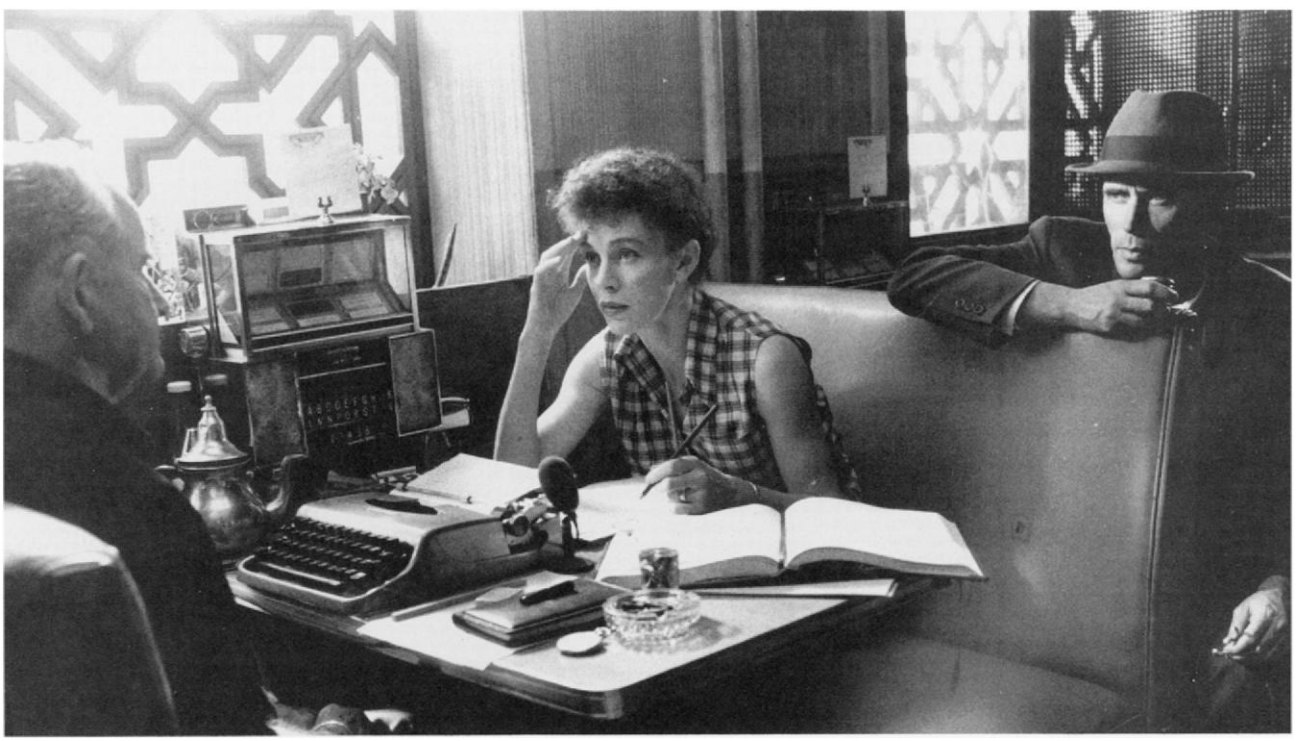
It was the central event of his life, and everything began from that point, again and again. There was no way to erase it or forget it or pay for it. He has to relive that trauma repeatedly, and it's meant to be about his suffering, not about him getting rid of the woman in his life so he could be creative. It was only after he came to terms with her loss that he began to write seriously again.

Burroughs was very much obsessed with Allen Ginsberg during the time he was in Tangier—long, passionate letters and confessions of depending upon him as a writer *are part of the record. You don't seem to want to make much of their relationship, and in your film Kerouac and Ginsberg seem to be more like Tweedledum and Tweedledee than like the two comrades with whom Burroughs had launched the Beat era.*

Admittedly, I didn't want to get into the history of Ginsberg or Kerouac, and I didn't want to have to take them on as well, because this is only secondarily a film about the Beats. For me, they worked well in that way, because that's how Bill Lee saw them. You see, Burroughs had been their mentor. He was older and they looked up to him, but he was also this guru who required care, and in looking after him they fulfilled their bond. They saw it as their duty to pull together what spewed out of Bill's creative genius.

Why do you shy away from Burroughs' homosexuality—a Hollywood taboo or just too kinky?

Writer's block: Bill Lee watches Tom and Joan Frost (Ian Holm and Judy Davis)



His friend Kiki is portrayed as his lover, but it was something that I just didn't feel that I could delve into. I was sort of damned if I did and damned if I didn't. I myself am not homosexual and do not feel prepared to create a character as extreme in his homosexuality as in *Naked Lunch*. Believe me, I struggled with it aesthetically and morally, because it seemed a kind of transgression, but I finally decided to let go of it.

I approached Bill about it to inform him of my decision because it felt like the fair thing to do. He just said, don't worry, it's your movie, do whatever you want. He likes to invoke the famous line of Raymond Chandler, when people asked him if he liked what Hollywood had done to all his books: "They haven't done a thing to my books. They're all right up there on the shelf."

What does Burroughs think of the film?

He's told countless people it's a great film. He's also said that he doesn't recognize any of the people up there. And why should he? There is this *act* that occurs between the life of the person creating and the work of art that transforms and separates the two of them. That's what this movie is about.

Did Ginsberg have anything to say?

Through a friend, he let me know that he liked it very much and found it funny and true to the spirit of Burroughs—because, I believe, the film is an inquiry into the particular kind of intelligence they had which does not depend upon homosexuality.

A lot of the gay press would disagree.

Well, I did have this contretemps with *The Advocate*, because they refused to believe or to print my statement that Burroughs had actually renounced his homosexuality at one stage. . . .

Yes, it seems that after finishing Naked Lunch, *Burroughs claimed that writing it had exorcized some of his devils and that it had provided a resolution to the sexual conflicts he suffered.*[1] *Of course, he also regularly gave up drugs!*

I did so much research for this that I cannot remember all the sources, and when somebody challenges you in that way, you think, why bother? My film is about creativity—its anxieties, its lifestyle, its dangers.

What do you mean by that?

It's interesting that Jane Bowles once spoke to Burroughs about her fear of the danger of writing —of exposing yourself and your ideas to things entirely beyond your control.

Is that the point of the Mugwump ordering Bill to the Interzone to file reports on enemy agents—or of typewriters turning into threatening bugs and heads? They're not so much threatening as funny.

I haven't thought about it in exactly that way, but we did want that surreal aspect of the film to carry an absurd humor. Think about it! The talking asshole is a very literal image of the serious social taboo against expressing anything with, through, or about human orifices. That was one of Burroughs' more infamous contributions to literature, which somehow strikes a chord, you know? It breaks through the organization of our bodies and our lives into proper, acceptable forms of presentation.

Likewise, the bugs have escaped from the conscious mind, through the architecture of ideas, through the cracks that release creative ideas. To have mechanical devices transformed into bugs is a way of showing how they are really subservient to the organic flow of the imagination.

The second typewriter he borrows turns into a head; he has to stick his hands in its mouth to type.

That's surreal, isn't it? I don't have an explanation for choosing a head in that case, but I do believe it must go back to the dangerous aspect of writing. To stick your hands into the maw of the beast is dangerous, and it's also like trying to perform brain surgery through the mouth.

What about the hand that also thrusts into a surprisingly vaginal orifice?

The fear's the same: the implications of a vagina dentata have been built up through previous imagery. I want to emphasize my reasons for such sexual imagery, because it is so commonly misunderstood. It is not sexist. It's the visual life of this particular story, and it's not a pronouncement on women. This is the story of one Bill Lee, who is not even William Burroughs, but rather a man who must write himself out of a nightmare.

Is that the nightmare of drug addiction? I recall that Burroughs was supposedly not addicted during the time he was writing Naked Lunch.

Well, the trouble is Burroughs *was* an addict, and he wrote out of addiction. There's no getting around it, even if he was not an addict during the act of creating his novel. There is something about the addictive personality that is more compelling than the fact that he satisfies it with narcotics. For example, Burroughs' wife Joan had a really vile habit and took drugs throughout the time she carried their child; people saw her wasting away right in front of them. She couldn't survive her own addiction, but Bill could. I'm not sure why, but his addiction rose out of exploration rather than escape. He figured out a way to go back and forth from the straight world to the world of the addict. Literati view him as a translator from that world.

Theories Burroughs has proposed or notions threaded through his work make him sound like a crackpot, but in his public appearances he always seems coherent and very controlled. He has a kind of glacial monumentality.

He does, but personally he is a very sweet and surprisingly gentle person. When I first met him—the day before his 70th birthday and arranged by our producer, Jeremy Thomas—what struck me was his shyness and gentle nature. We established a kind of trust, and I felt almost protective of him, which provided even stronger incentives to develop the character away from the man Burroughs and make of him a fictional hero caught between Tangier and the completion of *Naked Lunch.*

Were you ever tempted to put Burroughs in the film, even in a cameo?

Never. It would have been a total betrayal of what the film is about. I might put him in another film, because I like his presence and self-possession in something like *Drugstore Cowboy.* Here, it would point in a self-conscious way to the source. The use of a writer in that way can become exploitative and confuse an audience as to your purpose.

The acting styles of Weller as Bill Lee and the guys riffing on the personalities of other characters drawn from the days in Tangier as well as from Burroughs' book form a very rich jumble. Dr. Benway is from sci-fi, Bill Lee from Pilgrim's Progress . . .

What you're getting at is interesting, because the characters have the quality of apparitions and a symbolic force which rises from an extreme presentation by that particular actor that is, in addition, appropriate to the character's position in the overall odyssey. It's a gallery, not a society.

You spent some time in North Africa yourself in preproduction before the Gulf War broke out . . .

God, yes. We had done our homework and toured Tangier "in the footsteps of the master" with Jeremy and Bill, trying to trace the atmosphere, influences. The landscape has such a strong pull that it's hard to resist attempting to put it on screen. It's remarkably stark and has a magical or maybe mystical sensibility that is completely at one with Burroughs' sensibility.

But then the war broke out and there was no way we could insure the film or actors, and we had no choice but to pack up and go back to Toronto and rewrite it as an interior tale of a man's mind rather than of his environment being peopled by monsters. I think it was a blessing in disguise and forced the film into a claustrophobic feeling that is perfectly appropriate.

How much control did you have over the music for Naked Lunch*?*

Actually, that was very exciting. Howard Shore came up with the idea of using jazz, and of course everybody agreed that it was the right idea, the right tone, the right mood. But then that simply opens up a wide choice. Then someone came up with Ornette Coleman and he liked the idea. You see, he'd known Burroughs in Tangier back in 1973, when Coleman went to a village called Joujouka to take part in certain rituals and play with the musicians who had been studying ancient techniques. Burroughs had been there to see Coleman participate in the annual ritual, so the reunion of Coleman doing a sound track for the experiences that Burroughs had formulated out of Tangier was . . . kismet. Coleman worked out a score that is so sensitive, it provides a kind of pulse for Bill Lee's emotions. It's a perfect sound track—subtle, a little spooky, full of mystical implications—like the film.

▪ Karen Jaehne has just produced a low-budget feature, *Jack and His Friends.*

1. See Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988).

Holly Willis

An Interview with Nina Menkes

In the early thirties, Pierre Klossowski coined the term "method of obstinacy" in reference to the unique and diffident work of Georges Bataille. In the nineties, the term regains currency, this time in reference to the work of independent film-maker Nina Menkes, an artist whose work is stubbornly uncompromising. A graduate of the film school at UCLA, Menkes claims allegiance to no one in cinema history, and while the aesthetic rigor of her two feature films, *Magdalena Viraga* (1986) and *Queen of Diamonds* (1991), has led critics to connect them with Chantal Ackerman and Michelangelo Antonioni, Menkes's combination of feminist politics and an unnerving aesthetic style makes her work unique.

Although Menkes's work is not widely known, she has received widespread recognition in the form of grants and awards. In 1984 *The Great Sadness of Zohara* won a special jury mention at the San Francisco International Film Festival and a Silver Medal at the Festival of Festivals in Houston. *Magdalena Viraga* has also won several prizes, including Best Independent/Experimental Film from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. In 1991, *Queen of Diamonds* played at the Sundance Film Festival, the AFI Festival in Los Angeles, the Munich Film Festival, the Women's Film Festival in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Independent's Forum at UCLA, and at a special benefit screening for Filmforum in Los Angeles.

Menkes's career began with her 40-minute film *The Great Sadness of Zohara*, which was finished in 1983. This film establishes many of the themes and formal patterns that recur in Menkes's work, as well as introducing to an international audience Tinka Menkes, Nina's sister, who plays the protagonist in Menkes's two subsequent films and who works as Nina's collaborator.

The Great Sadness of Zohara follows the journey of Zohara from the streets of Jerusalem to the markets of Morocco and back again, a spiritual journey with no epiphany but rather a confirmation of alienation. Zohara's alienation is elegantly evoked through precise framing and the careful placement of Zohara in a landscape. The camera is most often stationary, holding a carefully composed frame through which Zohara moves. When the camera becomes mobile, as it does on a few occasions, the result is a terrible uneasiness, as though the ground were being pulled out from under it.

Menkes is also very conscious of colors in the film, using them to demarcate Zohara and her surroundings. In the beginning of the film, Zohara appears dressed in brown, which clearly distinguishes her from the men around her, who are clad all in black. Later, Zohara awakens in a room bathed in an eerie white light. The lines of her metal bed frame swoop across the frame in an attempt to anchor the shot but to no avail—the

Tinka Menkes (right) in a street scene from *The Great Sadness of Zohara*

light pouring through the window makes everything in the room weightless and diffuse.

The sound track parallels the visuals, acting as an equal attribute in the film rather than a mere complement. Menkes uses a mix of diegetic and nondiegetic sounds—one hears voices whispering, speaking, chanting, and shouting, laughter and bells. The sounds are subjective and suggest an overloaded mind or a world of terrible confusion.

In Menkes's first feature, *Magdalena Viraga*, the narrative line is stronger. The plot of the film is brief—a young prostitute is wrongly accused of murder—and while the film may be seen as an unravelling of the truth and the eventual discovery of the real murderess, the *mise en scène* of threatening Christian iconography designates the implicit guilt of all women. Again, however, what is important is the figure in the landscape and the emotional tonality evoked through rigorous visual design.

As in *The Great Sadness of Zohara*, Menkes carefully composes her shots, and Ida, played by Tinka, either moves through them or remains adamantly still. Colors are also carefully chosen—Ida's deep black eyes, her flashing red lipstick and her blue rose dress, a bedroom of soft beige tones, a pale blue pool. . . . The notion of the long take reaches an extreme in *Magdalena Viraga*, but the beauty of the colors and the detail that Menkes is clearly asking her viewers to note makes such an extreme reasonable, and even pleasurable, because it all fits. The oscillation between Ida's wrenching angst and the exquisite imagery of Menkes's camera eventually induces their reconciliation, an absolving of polarities that, not by coincidence, is also the elemental work of magic.

Inspired in part by the work of Gertrude Stein, Mary Daly, and Anne Sexton, *Magdalena Viraga* is difficult, discomfiting, and complex, evoking a reality of experience rarely depicted. Menkes describes the film as a descent into the underworld, home of the monstrous or shadow feminine, and Ida consecrates her negative power as any true feminist when she chants thrice, "I am a witch."

There is a similar path traced between two worlds in *Queen of Diamonds*, although the protagonist of this film, Firdaus, is less a victim and more a translucent onlooker. Once again, most of the shots of the film are a composition through which a story may make its hapless way. The film takes place in the Par-a-Dice casino in Las Vegas, and in the surrounding desert. Inside the casino, there is a cacophony of noise and lights, poker chips, and the flash of cards across the green felt tables. The scenes outside the casino are bright and clear. The sand is a glaring white, the sky a clear

dark blue, the water sparkling in the sun. Night brings some eeriness—a dead cat and Christ upside down on a cross—but also extraordinary beauty when three elephants appear in a soft light and dance a slow dance, trunks and tremendous bodies swaying with an amazing grace.

The film has the strongest narrative structure of the three films, and also its greatest subversion. *Queen of Diamonds* is roughly structured in three parts with a beginning, middle, and end, although —as Godard once said—not necessarily in that order. The beginning introduces Firdaus in a series of nearly static shots or tableaux. Again, some elements of plot are suggested, and these are returned to in the end, but the emphasis remains on the isolation of the central character and a range of connotations suggested by her link to the world, the landscape.

It is the middle sequence, however, which is the most astounding. It is a 17-minute scene that deviates from the long, still shots preceding and following it, thereby hinting at a climax through a burst of action. The camera zooms and tracks and the editing is fast and furious, but the action, the climax so emphatically celebrated, is a bluff. Firdaus deals the cards, and deals and deals in a scene that goes on relentlessly. As Menkes puts it, "Even when something is happening, nothing is happening," a statement that sums up her delineation between the Real and reality, and her disdain for the Hollywood hoax of creating something out of nothing.

Nina and I met for this interview in May, 1991, following the Los Angeles premiere of *Queen of Diamonds*.

HOLLY WILLIS: *With both* Magdalena Viraga *and* Queen of Diamonds *there is a connection to certain feminist film traditions—with* Magdalena Viraga *to both* Jeanne Dielman *and* A Question of Silence *and the explicit response to oppression through murder, and with* Queen of Diamonds *to, again,* Jeanne Dielman *through an aesthetic parallel. How do you situate yourself in regard to a feminist avant-garde tradition?*

NINA MENKES: I want to say immediately that I am not theoretically informed and that I never work from that position. I have never tried to be "experimental" or feminist. The films Tinka and I make come from an intuitive place. The fact that they have come out as being increasingly radical and definitely feminist is a consequence of giving true expression—whatever "true" means—to the reality of our own experience. Since I'm a woman in a sexist society, what I give voice to is pretty painful.

If your brain is always controlling your intuition, it blocks the stuff that might be able to move up and hit you from behind—hot (or ice-cold) from your unconscious. If you work intuitively, things fall into patterns that are more complex and interesting. It also means that the film can talk back to me, can reveal things to me; it's not just me controlling it.

Not being so worked out leaves room for other people to discover patterns . . .

The structures of information are so oppressive that finding your own personal view and believing that it's valid is the biggest struggle. When I'm shooting or editing, I really put on blinders. I don't read papers, watch TV, or see films, and then between films I try to absorb a lot of information. But getting back to a feminist avant-garde, Chantal Ackerman's work shares similarities with mine that are almost freakish—probably because there is a definite shared emotion or perception that manifests itself formally in similar ways.

Is there anyone's work that you particularly admire?

Films I saw and loved when I was growing up were Antonioni's *Red Desert* and early Werner Herzog movies, especially *Fata Morgana*. But I didn't see a lot of work until after I was well into my own film-making, so I'm not especially film-literate. I have the feeling that I've struggled in many ways in the dark. This is sort of on purpose. I don't like to be too inundated with other people's ideas or their thought-prisons.

What is most striking about Magdalena Viraga *is the use of language. All three women noted as sources of inspiration are writers who have pushed the boundaries of language in terms of literature —how does that project change in a cinematic context?*

I guess I've been more influenced by writers and painters because women have made a lot more

strides in those fields in terms of breaking with oppressive traditions. I love Gertrude Stein because her emotions, her anti-patriarchal stance, are manifested formally and reading her unlocks my brain. And Anne Sexton spoke about taboo female things —she was one of the first to write about menstruation. These writers opened me up. I don't think the medium matters. What matters is loosening the mind.

You work very closely with your sister, Tinka, on all of your projects—how would you characterize your collaboration?

Our collaboration has evolved slowly. When I was just starting at UCLA, we had to make a ten-minute Super-8 film and my actress didn't show up. I thought, "Oh well, maybe Tinka would like to do it." When we saw the rushes we got very excited—something very beautiful was there. And then we did another film. We never said, "We are going to make films together." It was unplanned, but at this point it is a very profound partnership. I guess I would characterize our collaboration as a politically charged shamanistic love rite.

In Queen of Diamonds *there is no hierarchy between the character and the landscape—they merge together. . . .*

Tinka somehow becomes such a part of the film that it is hard to separate her from the frame —this is because she impacts every part of the frame. She doesn't just sit in a room, she transforms a room into her lair. And in *Queen of Diamonds*, Tinka really took this to a new level, because her challenge in that film was to be in every single scene, to be the lead, but yet to be invisible because the film is about the experience of being background. And she accomplished this.

In your films there seems to be a disjuncture between the exquisite imagery and precise framing on a formal level and your protagonists, who are so oppressed. This raises the issue of pleasure. . . .

Well, I always say when one talks about pleasure we have to ask—pleasure for who? Maybe a typical male viewer might enjoy watching an objectified female, but I would suffer from seeing the same thing. I get pleasure from watching Tinka in *Queen of Diamonds* because I identify with her intense rejection of the system. And in terms of the so-called pleasure of narrative, it's the same. I hate Hollywood narratives and get zero pleasure from them. I get total cinematic pleasure, however, from *Wavelength*. So for me, the important thing is expressing my experience, even if it's painful—and why shouldn't it be beautiful?

You use very long takes. Why?

Well, I film stuff the way I feel, so I let the camera run until I sense that the shot is over. Hollywood film is structured to bombard you so that you cannot have your own experience or thoughts about what is going on, which of course is how the whole culture is organised—to obliterate the individual. A long take allows time to actually feel something in a different kind of way. It's also about that famous line by, I think, Virginia Woolf: "It's only when a walk is a little too long that everything can start to happen."

Both Lizzie Borden and Ulrike Ottinger are women who, in very different ways, take on an explicit critique of patriarchy mobilized through both narrative structure and theme. How do you characterize the link between transgression on a formal level and on a thematic level? In other words, does a film with a feminist "story" have to incorporate a nontraditional or avant-garde aesthetic?

I think that the whole idea of a traditional story with transgressive politics can work, although I would not put *Working Girls* into this category. But take *Broken Mirrors*, by Marleen Gorris, for example. It is a traditional thriller and you're on the edge of your seat and it looks like a Hollywood film and yet it's about a gang of lesbians and the message of the story is very radical. It's a call to arms, really.

Personally, though, I am becoming increasingly uninterested in standard cause-and-effect thinking. It is ultimately a reduction of reality. What I want to do with film is expand reality, show facets that are generally veiled by various pervasive and desultory ideologies, including narratives. I mean that narrative itself distorts reality. In narrative you have A then B and then C. But nature doesn't work like this at all. Not at all.

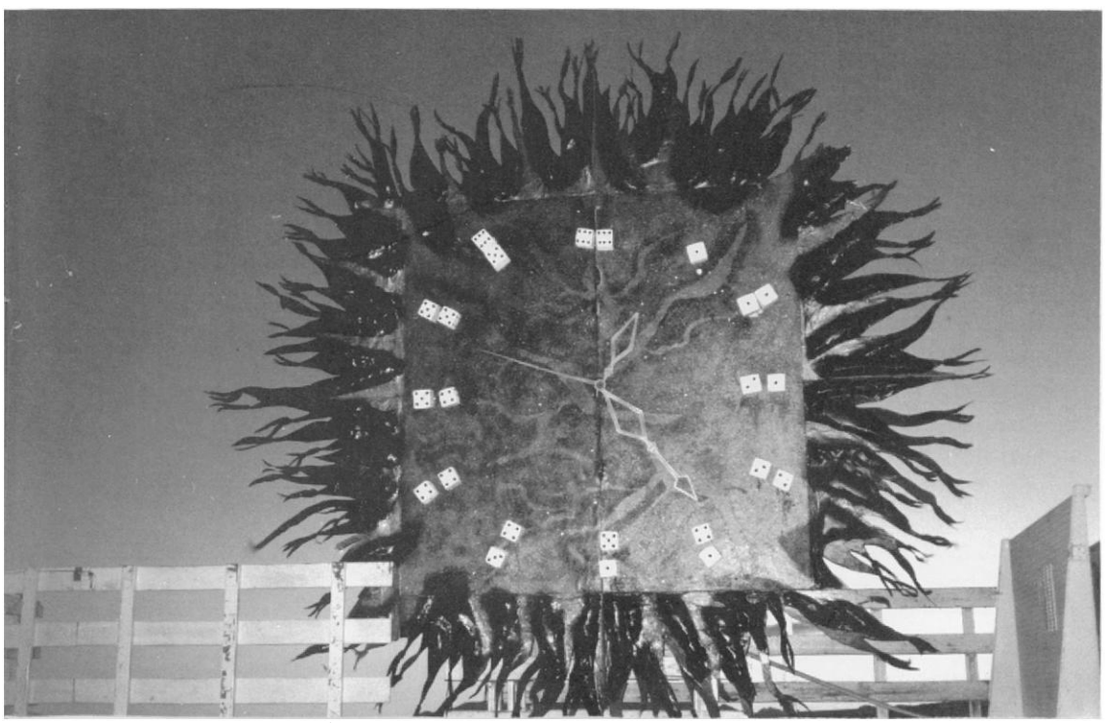
The budgets for both Magdalena Viraga *and* Queen of Diamonds *were extraordinarily low. Would you like to work with more money or is having a low budget a political choice?*

Magdalena Viraga with
Tinka Menkes

Well, I'd like to work with a little more money but yes, a low budget is a political choice. The Hollywood system is inflated on every level, it is complete insanity. The number of people on sets is totally unnecessary and it's all an ego thing. In terms of my own work, I think it would be nice to be paid a reasonable salary and to be able to pay the people involved in the film. In *Queen of Diamonds* I got a lot of things free but even if I hadn't, I wouldn't have spent more than $125,000 on the film, which is considered insanely low for 35mm color Dolby. I would also like more money because one of the projects I am thinking about now is very ornate with wild costumes, which will cost a bit more, though I would still never spend as much as the Hollywood people. There is an Aboriginal saying that Tinka has been quoting a lot lately, and I think it speaks directly to this issue: "The more you know the less you need."

At a recent screening you mentioned your notion of the shadow feminine. Can you talk about that a little?

Well, the shadow feminine is very culturally specific, but I would say in the U.S. it's the pain and wounding that we carry around with us and that is absolutely taboo. In fact, all pain is taboo here. Old people and sick people are shunted away.



Giant dice clock in
Queen of Diamonds

But in the case of women, it's so extreme. Women here are supposed to look and act in a very specific way that could be summarized as "friendly and fuckable." Also, we have to have perfect, flawless skin, which we can simulate by applying makeup. To be even minimally presentable, we have to fix ourselves up. Well, why do we have to cover up? Cover up what? You see, it's all that pain and rage and wounding that comes from not being seen at all, from being forced into this very unnatural shape. In *Magdalena Viraga* and *Queen of Diamonds* it is *this* wounded figure which appears, unveiled. She's sort of straight out of the menstrual hut, and she's not cleaned up. So you could say the shadow feminine for me has to do with these hidden layers.

Tinka's characters are always history-less and this connects, too, to the obliterated history of women, but the characters are also futureless. They come into being for the duration of the film and then they vanish. A typical Hollywood character, in contrast, always has a past, a backstory—they are supposed to be "real people." But recreating ordinary life doesn't interest me at all. I am more interested in the aspects that life wears in secret.

With Tinka's characters we are also exploring an alternative myth of personal transformation, different from the classic model of spiritual search. When Zohara returns from her arduous journey she is not celebrated but is quickly reaccommodated to her secondary status. The classic model doesn't work for the underdog. The whole idea of entering and plundering the underworld and returning home with this stolen treasure is profoundly imperialistic! What happens to the looted underworld? It's forgotten, never discussed. *Magdalena Viraga* takes place within this looted and forgotten underworld and Ida isn't making any round trips. She says, "Here I am and yes, I am a witch."

In *Queen of Diamonds*, there is a conflation of the Underworld and the Upper world. Firdaus, in rejecting dichotomous definitions, sees more objectively, more clearly. It is her act of witnessing which transforms the landscape—and the landscape is beginning to crack.

The so-called shadow feminine is also connected in my mind to the abyss and death, to chaos. In Christianity, Christ is committed to a victory over death, and in Hollywood, the correlation between sex and death invariably leaves the female mutilated. Tinka, in *Queen of Diamonds*, doesn't overcome death and is not overcome by it. She coexists with it, she's unafraid of it.

Can this notion of the shadow feminine then be construed as a political agenda?

In a way, yes, because I'm saying, "Look at this, look at what is happening here," with the feeling, of course, that it's not so great. Well, we all know that the way our system is structured is a disaster for everyone, even those at the top. This is becoming so obvious with the collapse of the environment. On another level, though, I have no agenda. I just express myself, and I get a lot of intense pleasure from my work. And people have read the films in so many different ways. I guess I hope that my work will reverberate with other people's sense of self.

Do you want audiences to like your films?

It is becoming less and less important. I have learned the hard way that not everyone will love my films. When I showed *A Soft Warrior*, our first ten-minute film, at UCLA and someone criticized it, I was amazed. How can you criticize this work made with total love? Now I'm used to it. And I also realize that if masses of people loved my films, it would probably be a very bad sign.

A funny thing happened with *Queen of Diamonds*. Tinka and I were very committed to the structuring of the film just the way it is—with the 17-minute center section of dealing. And I thought —well, this is the right way to cut this film but it might be a disaster, maybe everyone will walk out during that scene. But then, it turns out that this film is more accessible to more people than *Magdalena Viraga*! So, you see, you never know.

Do you have any plans for your next film?

A non-meeting of the wounded feminine and the wounded masculine. And an ornate, alienated fairy tale. And Tinka wants to be a centaur. She says a centaur is so non-aggressive. A centaur was a witness to the creation of the world.

▪ Holly Willis is a graduate student in Critical Studies at the University of Southern California and is the editor of *Montage*.

The films discussed in this interview can be rented from Menkes Film, 8996 Keith Ave., West Hollywood, CA 90069.

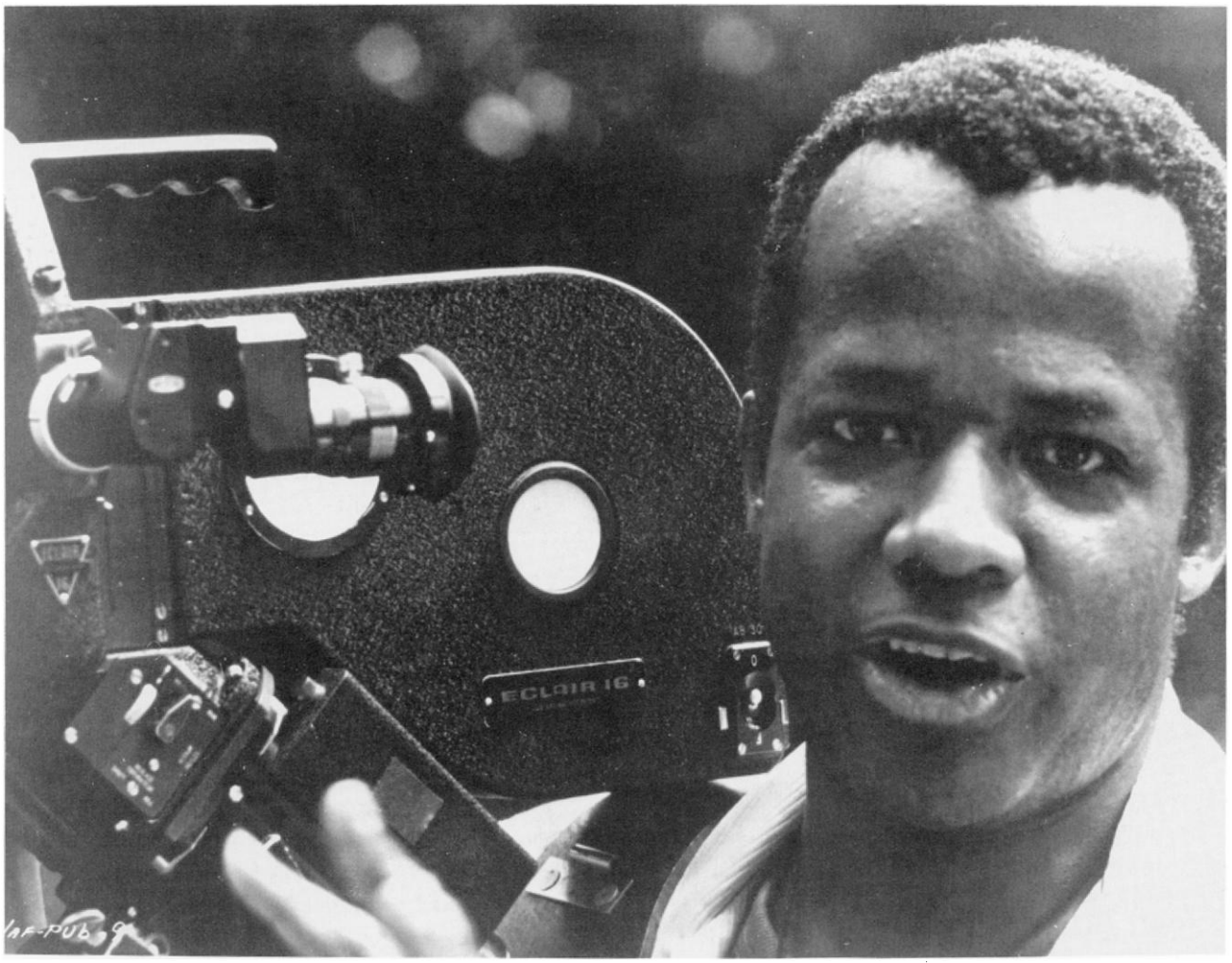
Adam Knee and *Charles Musser*

William Greaves, Documentary Film-making, and the African-American Experience

The reputations of many documentary film-makers rest on their production of one or two ground-breaking pictures. But there are some, such as William Greaves, whose real achievements only become apparent when we look at the full accumulation of their work. In Greaves's case this was made possible by a recent retrospective of his films at the Brooklyn Museum. It included a screening of his never-released, unconventional, *cinéma-vérité*-ish feature film *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (1968/1971), which is now being screened at festivals, art houses, and museums. Moreover, Greaves is still making innovative, rigorous films —as demonstrated by his documentary *Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice* (1989), a historical biography of the black feminist civil rights leader Ida Wells that recently aired on PBS's "The American Experience" and that has won numerous prizes on the festival circuit.

Black independent film-maker Bill Greaves has played a significant if not always fully appreciated role in the creation of a new post-1968 era in U.S. documentary cinema—one that is characterized by greater cultural diversity among those making films. During the nineteen-fifties and early nineteen-sixties Greaves endured a protracted struggle to establish himself as a documentary film-maker of artistic integrity. By the mid-nineteen-sixties he finally began to produce films on subjects of particular importance to African Americans. In 1968, while continuing to further develop his own still limited film-making opportunities, Greaves began to assist a new generation of young black documentarians through the initial stages of their professional careers—film-makers such as Kent Garrett, Madeline Anderson, and St. Clair Bourne. Greaves was not only a harbinger of a new era of multicultural film-making but a pivotal figure in the history of African-American cinema.

Greaves, in addition to being an important historical force, has produced an impressive and surprisingly diverse body of work, both in approach and subject matter. This testifies, on one hand, to his inventiveness and broad range of interests and, on the other, to the numerous practical exigencies he has faced over several decades. Greaves has received much recognition for his work as executive producer and co-host of public television's "Black Journal," an Emmy-winning public-affairs series, and for his direction of such ground-breaking films as the historical documentary *From These Roots* (1974), which looks at Harlem during its cultural renaissance in the twenties and early thirties. However, the broader course of Greaves's career and the substantial contribution he has made to African-American film production—from acting in black-cast films during the nineteen-forties to serving as executive producer on



William Greaves during shooting of *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*

Richard Pryor's 1981 hit, *Bustin' Loose*—are only now starting to receive adequate attention.

Even aside from the scores of films and television programs that Greaves has produced, directed, edited, photographed, written, and/or appeared in, his career itself deserves attention for the way it traces many aspects of African-American involvement in (and exclusion from) motion picture, television, and related industries. He was born and raised in Harlem and educated at Stuyvesant High School. While enrolled as an engineering student at City College of New York during the early forties, Greaves used his skills as a social dancer to become a performer in African dance troupes. From there he moved into acting at the American Negro Theater and was soon working in radio, television, and film. Among the films he was featured in (and sometimes sang in) at this time were the whodunit *Miracle in Harlem* (1947), one of the most technically polished of black-cast films, and the Louis de Rochemont-produced *Lost Boundaries* (1948), a highly popular film based on a true story about a black doctor who set up a practice in a New England town while "passing" for white.[1] The doctor and his family are played by white actors (in keeping with Hollywood conventions of the day), while Greaves portrays a debonair black college student who is completely comfortable with his African-American identity as he interacts with his white counterparts. It was an image seldom if ever seen in American films prior to that date. Greaves's role here clearly prefigured many of those played by Sidney Poitier in the next decade, and one is apt to wonder whether Greaves

would have become one of the crossover stars of the fifties had he remained in screen acting.[2]

Greaves on *Lost Boundaries*:

You have to decide when you make a movie—and it's a tough decision—how authentic, how pure, how faithful you must be to reality while at the same time making this product so that people will go to see it. This is an extremely tricky, difficult challenge for a filmmaker. And in the climate of an extremely racist society, this was a marketing problem. Now Lost Boundaries *turned out to be a massive hit. It ran for six months on Broadway, which was practically unheard of. It played at the Astor Theater and won awards and one thing or another. Mel Ferrer, the star, did a very fine piece of work. It was a very moving film. You say, Jesus, why didn't they have some light-skinned blacks in those roles? You can ask that question very aggressively today, but at the time you had to take into account the very cold temperature of the country.*[3]

Greaves himself moved easily between the white and black worlds. After acting in such ANT productions as Owen Dodson's *Garden of Time* and *Henri Christophe*, he appeared in the musical *Finian's Rainbow*, which began a two-year run on Broadway in January, 1947. As the show came to a close, Greaves joined the Actors Studio, becoming a member alongside Marlon Brando, Shelley Winters, Eli Wallach, and others. Despite this illustrious affiliation, Greaves was increasingly frustrated with the demeaning roles available to him (and blacks more generally) in theater and film. A decisive moment came in 1950, when he was slated to appear in the Broadway revival of Ben Hecht and Charles McArthur's *Twentieth Century*, starring Gloria Swanson and José Ferrer (who also directed and produced).[4] Upon reporting to the theater, Greaves discovered that he was to play a stereotypical bumbling porter and quit on the spot.

Greaves on *Twentieth Century*:

All I knew was that I had built up a little reputation and my agent said "You have a part." So I reported to the theater. And then I saw this goddamn dialogue which they put in my hand and Ferrer said, "You're going to be this Uncle Tom type." I just walked out. Whenever that kind of role came up I would never play it, because it was just too demeaning. Actually that was the final straw. That was the thing that made me realize I have to get on the other side of the camera because they were messing with the image of black people with impunity.

Deciding he had to move into film production, Greaves enrolled in film-making courses at City College. With the exception of de Rochemont, who allowed him into the studio as an apprentice, no one seemed prepared to provide him the needed opportunities to achieve his goals. Like Melvin Van Peebles and many other African-American artists during the fifties, Greaves finally had to leave the country to practice his craft. In 1952, fed up with McCarthyism and the exclusionary practices of motion picture unions, Greaves moved to Canada.

Greaves on his move to Canada:

It became obvious to me that either I would stay in America and allow myself to be made a fool of, or become a very neurotic person, or be destroyed. Or leave. So I left, which was fortunate because I had a very good opportunity in Canada. The Canadians were much more liberal than Americans. Race didn't have that much meaning to them. And I was fortunate to be taken onto the production staff of the National Film Board of Canada, set up by John Grierson.

I had been reading Grierson on documentary and was very taken by his discussion of the social uses of film. He proposed ways in which film could be a social force, an educational tool, and this interested me.

Greaves worked his way up over the next six years at the National Film Board through various editing jobs to directorial work. His tenure there culminated with his directing and editing of *Emergency Ward* (1958), a production for the Canadian government that documents the events of a typical Sunday night at a Montreal hospital emergency room.

Stylistically, *Emergency Ward* falls somewhere between the "Free Cinema" of Lindsay Anderson's *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957), with its carefully prepared set-ups and tripod-dependent

shooting style, and the *cinéma-vérité* style of *Lonely Boy* (1961), by Roman Kroiter and Wolf Koenig. (Not uncoincidentally, Koenig served as Greaves's cameraman on the film.) *Emergency Ward* was shot over the course of many nights and exposes us to the range of people admitted to the hospital: accident victims, people with imagined illness, people abandoned by their families, and others who are just plain lonely. Grierson's influence on Greaves is evident in this film: Greaves humanizes his subjects and reassures the viewer that the emergency ward at this institution is run as responsibly and as well as the post office in *Night Mail*. The doctors know their jobs and care; orderlies and nurses are ennobled. At the same time, this film might be seen as a forerunner of Frederick Wiseman's *Hospital* (1968), for instance in its visual sensitivity to character quirks, although it ultimately lacks Wiseman's aggressiveness and sense of style. While Greaves found the subject matter fascinating, it offered little for him to grab hold of, given his reasons for moving behind the camera. In the all-white world of a Montreal hospital, black racial identity was not a pressing issue. Greaves learned his craft and escaped the humiliations of American racism in Canada, but it was not a place where he could readily develop the kind of distinctive voice he had displayed as an actor.

Greaves was perfectly positioned to participate in the *cinéma vérité* revolution of the early sixties—until new senior management at the Film Board decided to place him in charge of its unit making science films. Sensing a dead end, Greaves left to create and direct with a Canadian acting troupe. In 1960, he joined the International Civil Aviation Organization (I.C.A.O.), an agency of the United Nations, as a public information officer. This, in turn, led to his making a one-hour television documentary about a round-the-world flight of a major airliner (*Cleared for Takeoff*, 1963; featuring Alistair Cooke). The U.N. job eventually required Greaves to move back to New York.

Greaves was by this time eager to return to the United States, as race relations were rapidly changing: the Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum and Kennedy's New Frontier was seeking to respond to its demands. New York filmmaker Shirley Clarke had seen *Emergency Ward* and was impressed. She told George Stevens, Jr., who was head of the United States Information Agency's film division, about Greaves, and Stevens, looking for a black director, soon contracted with him to do a documentary on dissent in America. The topic quickly proved too controversial for the agency, especially when it learned that Greaves planned to include people like professed atheist Madalyn E. Murray, the "no prayers in the school" leader, in the film. U.S.I.A. subsequently decided to change the film's focus to freedom of expression. Essentially, the resulting *Wealth of a Nation* (1964) maintains that America is great in part because its citizens are allowed "to do their own thing." In this context, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial takes on unexpected meaning, suggesting a purely personal vision rather than the expression of a larger political movement. Featuring footage of various artists and visionary architects at work, the film relies on a heavy narration to assert the potential social usefulness of individual creative expression. It ultimately becomes an essayistic paean to American myths.

Wealth of a Nation, nevertheless, established Greaves as an independent producer and with his next U.S.I.A. production he finally won the opportunity to focus on black culture from behind the camera. The African-American film-maker was originally dispatched to Dakar, Senegal, to shoot a historic gathering of black artists and intellectuals from throughout the African diaspora. The U.S.I.A. wanted a five-minute news clip. Upon arriving, however, Greaves immediately realized the value of a longer piece. After he, his cameraman, and driver shot as much footage as possible, largely without synchronous sound, Greaves utilized those editing skills acquired at the N.F.B. to put together an effective and comprehensive record of the event. This record, *The First World Festival of Negro Arts* (1966), features performances by dancers from throughout the black world and appearances by Duke Ellington, Katherine Dunham, Langston Hughes (whose poetry frames the film), and many others. Greaves's juxtapositions explore and affirm the links between African and African-American culture. It was Africans, however, rather than African Americans, who were given the opportunity to appreciate these links: while *First World Festival* proved the most popular U.S.I.A. film in Africa for the following decade, U.S.I.A. films were prohibited at the time

(and until recently) from distribution in the United States.[5] Although such links could have been radicalizing for African Americans, this affirmation was more likely to serve a conservative agenda when presented to Africans—in suggesting greater identity with the United States and, by implication, with its Vietnam-era policies. If the film is considered in terms of the politics of production, however, it represents an important achievement.

Greaves on *The First World Festival of Negro Arts*:

You have to realize that the reason why I went into motion pictures was to make films like The First World Festival of Negro Arts. *It was the first opportunity I had to make films that expressed a black perspective on reality. Until then I had not had access to financing which would permit that.*

The First World Festival of Negro Arts was quickly followed by another breakthrough film for Greaves, *Still a Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class*, a 90-minute television documentary made in collaboration with William Branch for National Educational Television (NET). By the summer of 1967, the nation's inner cities were in turmoil. Television news featured rioting blacks, creating a perception among many whites that African Americans were burning down the country. As envisioned by NET, *Still a Brother* was to focus on a group of "good negroes" as a way to challenge negative stereotypes held by whites and to encourage poorer blacks to see that the system was working and creating new economic opportunities. *Still a Brother*, completed in 1967, proved more controversial than NET had expected—ultimately focusing as it does on the rise of contemporary black-pride movements. Although the film's interviews with a number of successful blacks at times suggest a preoccupation with material gains—most pointedly in the opening interview, where a man describes his version of the American dream as owning a yacht and wearing a Brooks Brothers suit—they also bespeak the extreme barriers to achieving such gains, and their great fragility once achieved. Many interviewees agree that the loss of a well-paying job often means instant loss of middle-class status to African Americans. In its emphasis on the concerns of an emerging African-American middle class, the project was an especially personal one for Greaves.

Still a Brother looks at the danger of passive wholesale acceptance of white middle-class values by blacks—a phenomenon which Greaves has referred to as mental enslavement. The film's main contention, however, is that in the turbulent sixties, economically successful blacks were undergoing a mental revolution. Again and again, those interviewed reveal a growing understanding that the oppression of lower-income African Americans is their oppression as well. The perspective of the film, which supports black pride while stopping far short of advocating separatist politics, is one that continues to emerge in Greaves's work. It is better described as liberal than radical, but it is always questioning of liberal assumptions and sympathetic to radical goals.

Greaves on *Still a Brother*:

We had difficulties once Still a Brother *was finished because NET had not expected that kind of film. They had expected an* Ebony *magazine kind of film, but we brought them this documentary that talked about mental revolution and showed increasing militancy in the black experience. People are talking about black is beautiful, the African heritage, militancy, and championing Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael. So when NET executives saw the film they sort of blinked because they didn't know whether or not they really wanted to put it into the system. They weren't clear whether or not it would be acceptable. There was a great deal of anxiety because these executives were looking at their mortgages and didn't know whether they would be tossed out of their jobs. They didn't tell me that, but it was obvious that they were really under pressure. But I must say that they rose to the occasion, which speaks well of them, and of course the film eventually received an Emmy nomination and a Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival.*

Still a Brother was finally shown by NET on 29 April, 1968, less than three weeks after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. The newest round of riots, sparked by King's assassination,

reemphasized the urgency of the Kerner Report and its call for increased media coverage by minorities in the face of a growing separation between blacks and whites. Meanwhile, NET began to develop a national monthly magazine format "by, for and about" black Americans. Called "Black Journal," it had a predominantly black staff that included Lou Potter as "Editor," Sheila Smith as researcher, Madeline Anderson as film editor, and Charles Hobson, Kent Garrett, St. Clair Bourne, and Horace Jenkins as associate or full producers. From the many who auditioned to fill the roles of co-hosts, Lou House (who later changed his name to Walli Sadiq) and Bill Greaves were selected. Alvin H. Perlmutter, who is currently known for producing various Bill Moyers specials and "Adam Smith's Money World," was at the top of the pyramid, acting as executive producer.

The series debuted in June and was broadcast during prime time by many public television stations (Wednesdays at 9 PM in New York City). The first program displayed remarkable promise. It begins with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, widow, Coretta Scott King, giving a commencement speech at Harvard, and concludes with a brief, reasonably sympathetic portrait of the Black Panthers. Not only is the spectrum of black political opinion surveyed, but there is an historical segment on the black press. Even the portrait of the only black jockey in the United States is given an historical context, reminding viewers that jockeys of African descent had once been common in horse racing.

After the third program had been aired, certain contradictions within the production of "Black Journal" had crystallized. Although the series was being sold as "by, for and of the black community," the white Perlmutter was firmly in charge, and the programming was often dominated by white-produced segments. In mid-August, there was a palace revolt. Eleven of the 12 black staff members resigned in protest. NET was ready to rescind the "by, for and of" claims as deceptive. The staff members, in contrast, demanded a black executive producer—suggesting Lou Potter. NET maintained that Potter lacked adequate experience. The staff then suggested the two producers of *Still a Brother*, William Greaves and William Branch. Both were, NET claimed, unavailable.[6] Greaves, in fact, was vacationing on Cape Cod, and a quick phone call ascertained that he would take the position while retaining his role as co-host. Perlmutter became a consultant to the series, and black representation on the staff was increased.

Program No. 5 for "Black Journal" (October 1968) shows the series in full stride. In some respects, the format and aspirations of the series have changed little. Most obviously, Greaves now wears a dashiki instead of a sports coat and turtleneck, and Lou House begins and ends the program with greetings to "brothers and sisters" and a few words of Swahili. More substantively, the staff investigates controversial issues, such as the crisis surrounding the Community School Board in Oceanhill-Brownsville, in a polished and insightful manner. The producers emphasize those ways in which community control can provide better schooling that will result, for example, in dramatically improved reading scores. Black members of the school board make the case for community control, while the efforts of the United Federation of Teachers and its president, Albert Shanker, to subvert such an administrative structure are convincingly documented.

While offering a multiplicity of voices from within the African-American community, "Black Journal" presents forthright editorial comments without feeling the need to give "equal time" to extremely conservative blacks or to white spokespeople. In Program No. 5's short panel discussion, Professor Charles Hamilton, co-author with Stokely Carmichael of *Black Power*, simply states that there can be no peace in the nation until the United States gets out of Vietnam; ending the war is thus a key priority for African Americans. The program condemns the expulsion of protesting "black power" medal winners from the American Olympic team as excessive and insensitive to past racial injustices. It then documents the long-standing devaluation of African-American history and scholarship by profiling Professor William Leo Hansberry, a prominent scholar who was once denied a Ph.D. by Harvard University because no one at that institution was qualified to supervise his dissertation on African-American history.

"Black Journal" clearly deserved the Emmy it received in 1969. In a manner unique to magazine-format programming, the events of the present are situated in the context of unfolding African-American history, giving them deeper meaning and resonance.[7] Black identity is power-

fully constructed. "Black Journal" consistently shows representatives of the African-American community to be reasonable, articulate, and authoritative. These spokespeople are often in the position of judging the antisocial behavior of hysterical, unreasonable whites such as Albert Shanker, Presidential candidate George Wallace, or the Oakland police chief who condemns the Black Panthers in vitriolic terms. Traditional codings of authority by race are inverted; the nature of mainstream television representations stands exposed. As the experienced Greaves told his young staff, never again were they likely to find a production situation that was so protective of their views and offered them so much freedom.

Greaves on "Black Journal":

Periodically there was a little anxiety at NET, for instance when we decided to do a show on the Black Muslims, or Paul Robeson, or Malcolm X; but quite interestingly we had a great deal of freedom on that show. That is to say I was not bugged by the management of NET for several good reasons. First, they were basically people of good will. But more importantly, perhaps, was the fact that we had developed a lot of political clout. I had purposely cultivated the black press, so they were very much behind us; I cultivated the people in the Congressional Black Caucus. And, of course, there were all these riots and demonstrations going on, so they knew if they in a sense touched us, they might get burned. I'm overdramatizing this, but the situation in the sixties was so volatile and tense that it would have made no sense whatsoever for them to have this heavy hand on a show that had been put together specifically for the purposes of expressing the concerns of the black community. That was the point made by the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorder and the Carnegie Endowment. They would have been violating the mandate of the show.

Executive producer William Greaves with "Black Journal" producers and crew filming in Harlem.

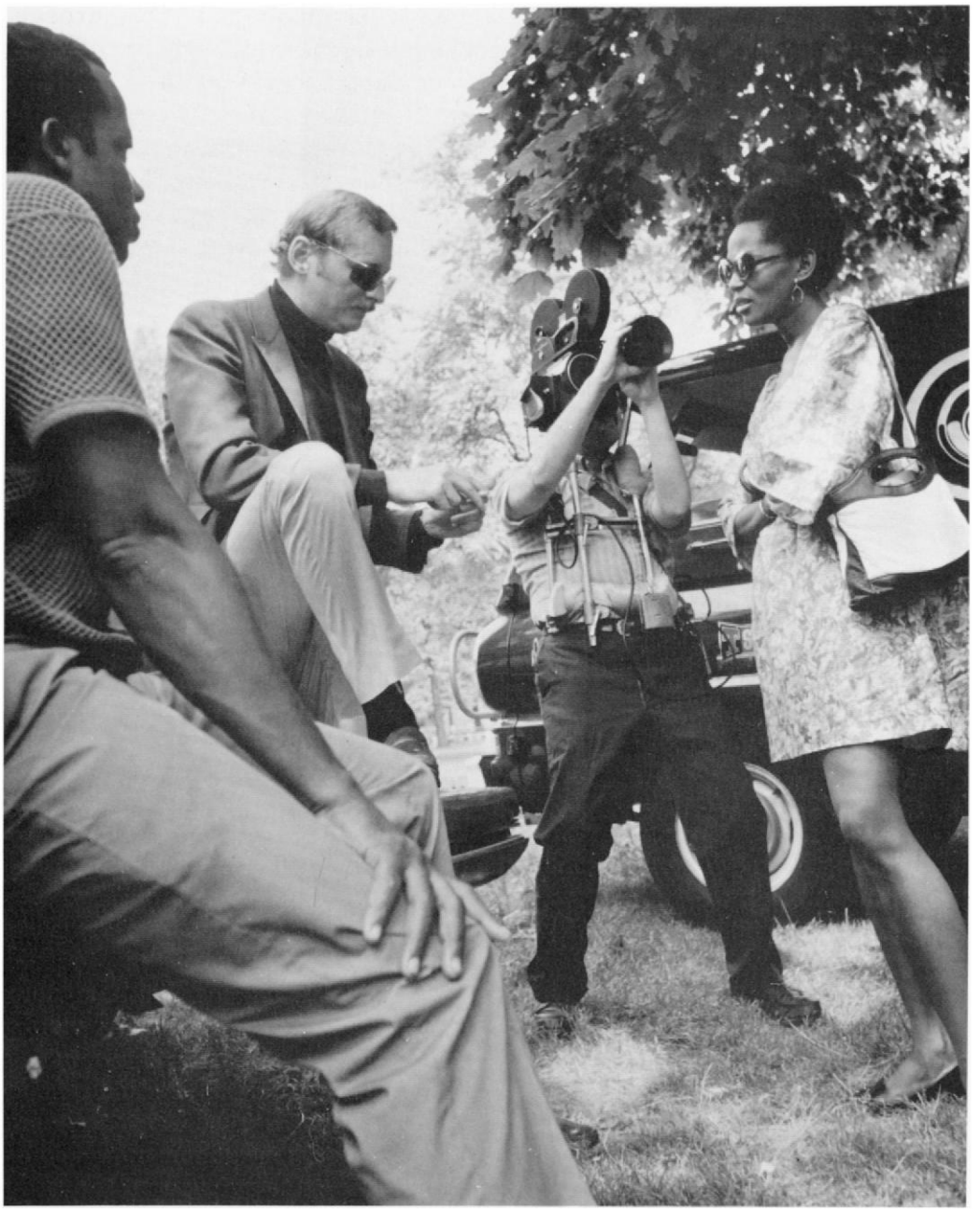
While serving as executive producer on "Black Journal," Greaves continued to operate his own production company, William Greaves Productions, which he had set up in 1964. In 1967 he applied his long-standing interest in acting and dramatic processes to a highly innovative feature film, eventually titled *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*. Still awaiting commercial release, this picture eludes traditional generic categories, being an often humorous *cinéma-vérité*-style documentary about the filming of a screen test for a larger dramatic work—and ultimately about its own making as well. In its freewheeling camera style, its playful editing and jump cutting, its use of direct camera address and improvisation, its self-aware, tongue-in-cheek humor, and its foregrounding of the film-making process and the medium's materiality, *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* shows affinities with the contemporaneous French New Wave, avant-garde American cinema, and *cinéma-vérité* documentary. In many respects, Greaves's work predates the wave of American features that were to make use of such techniques over the next few years, from Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969), which mixes documentary and fiction about events coinciding with the 1968 Chicago Democratic convention, to Rick King's *Off the Wall* (1976), in which a counterculture youth steals a camera from the documentary crew that is filming his life and begins to make his own record of life on the lam.

One of the most distinctive aspects of *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* is its emphasis on both film-making and acting as creative, improvisational processes. The actors do not merely play out the drama-within-the-film in New York's Central Park, they are actively involved in shaping it; the director attempts to put the rehearsing performers into a framework of tension and confrontation with each other and with himself—and then records the results. These planned dramatic conflicts sometimes spill out beyond the realm of fictional drama into actual tantrums and frustrations. The affinity between this approach and psychodrama therapy, in which patients act out their anxieties and conflicts, is hardly coincidental. Greaves has had a long-standing interest in psychodrama, seeing it as closely allied with the techniques of method acting.[8] He focused on psychodrama sessions in two later documentaries—*In the Company of Men* (1969) and *The Deep North* (1988).

As Greaves has explained his approach, "Everything that happens in the *Take One* environment interrelates and affects the psychology of the people and indeed of the creative process itself." Greaves's shooting methods—the simultaneous use of numerous cameras to cover both the drama and the filming context—are designed to best capture this total interactive "environment." Wary of Greaves's approach, the production crew film their own meeting, a kind of mini-"revolt," over the shape (or lack of one) that the film appears to be taking. Within the film's frustrated diegesis, Greaves plays the role of a rather inept director trying to make a film tentatively entitled *Over the Cliff*. Yet through his own audacity and directorial vision, Greaves the film-maker comically upends the demeaning stereotypes of black ineptitude that haunt American cinema. The racially mixed film crew of men and women (a makeup that was then quite unusual in film-making) is itself refreshingly open and committed in its ardent questioning of creative processes, conventional aesthetic forms, and, ultimately, attitudes toward sexuality (albeit in some terms that today one may easily find off-putting). It is a film that continued Greaves's interest in issues beyond the immediate ones of African-American politics and identity—and yet the film's failure to win critical affirmation and a commercial release discouraged him from pursuing further work along these lines.

Greaves on *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*:

> Symbiopsychotaxiplasm *is neither a documentary nor a traditional feature. At least I don't feel that it is. It is more of a happening. Instead of being a form of conventional art it is a piece of abstract art. Abstract in the sense that it does not obey the language of convention. It obeys the mind, the heart, the intuition, the subconscious. These are the determinants, rather than the Aristotelian approach to drama —the traditional dramatic form of Sophocles or Ibsen or whomever. You're going for—let's call it divine action, another level of insight into the human condition, using cinema.*
>
> *The fact is that we could take this event—this scene, this screen test—and throw it into a community of actors and cinema technicians and no matter how it fell, it would be a film.*



Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One's director, cast, and crew on location in Central Park

Before we knew it, we were dealing with some of the basic points of drama, which is conflict and development, progression, a rising conflict into some kind of crisis, climax and some resolution. It may not happen as we would like it, but some variant of that theme will occur. The problem for the film-maker is to find what the variant is and how to put it together in the editing room with the materials you have.

Ultimately Greaves recognized that he had to either become a full-time television executive or retain his independence as a film-maker and devote greater energies to independent production. In 1970 he left "Black Journal." The following year he made the feature-length "docutainment movie" *Ali, the Fighter*, about Muhammad Ali's first, unsuccessful effort to reclaim his heavyweight crown from Joe Frazier. (Ali had been stripped of his crown because of his radical politics and oppo-

Ali, the Fighter: Joe Frazier (left) and Muhammad Ali do battle at a pre-fight press conference

sition to the Vietnam War.) Greaves deftly interweaves exchanges between fighters and their fans with scenes of press conferences, training sessions, and business discussions—then ends with the fight itself. The film's behind-the-scenes images often pertain to the economic politics—and more implicitly the racial politics—involved in the promotion of the fight. While *Ali, the Fighter* received national distribution in commercial theaters, Greaves was not so fortunate with *Nationtime: Gary*, his film of the historic first National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana. Attended by about 10,000 people, this 1972 gathering included representatives from the full range of African-American culture and politics, from Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) to Jesse Jackson and Coretta Scott King. The film covers the efforts of participants to create a platform acceptable to the numerous constituencies within the black community. Jackson steals the show with a rousing and uncompromising speech calling for black political unity in the face of white-dominated party politics. The subject matter was considered too militant by commercial broadcasters, and the film never aired.

Greaves on *Nationtime: Gary*:

There was a guy who came into my office and said to me, "The Gary convention is going to be the greatest event in the history of black America, and you've got to take some cameras there. I can get you some money to make this film, and then after you make it you can sell it to television." He talked like that. "Money is no object." To make a long story short, we went down there and ended up paying our own fares because I was interested in the event anyway. We took some raw stock and filmed this event. Our company paid for that film entirely. So it practically bankrupted us (as have several other films). But we put the film together and I got Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte to do the narration. And I thought that with the two of them we wouldn't have any problem getting it onto the networks. But the networks and local stations wouldn't touch it. They thought the whole event was too militant and that the film was, as well. Don't misunderstand me. There were some technical problems with it

that we couldn't afford to fix. But essentially it was a major, major event. How can you say you don't want to show material of the crucifixion because it is out of focus? I'm not saying it was of that magnitude but it was a very important historical moment.

At this same time, Greaves relied for much of his income on films made for the Equal Opportunity Commission (*Voice of La Raza*, 1972), the Civil Service Commission (*On Merit*, 1972), NASA (*Where Dreams Come True*, 1979), and other government agencies; but he also began to produce important historical documentaries, beginning with *From These Roots* (1974), a look at the Harlem Renaissance of the nineteen-twenties. Among other things, the film was a return to Greaves's own roots growing up in Harlem. This pioneering effort treated the major contributors to that Renaissance with much greater sympathy and insight than the then standard book on the subject—Nathan Huggins's *The Harlem Renaissance*. With little stock footage of Harlem and its intellectuals available, Greaves decided to construct a film composed exclusively of photographs. What emerged was a compelling portrait of a community made strong by relative freedom and opportunity. Within the larger context of documentary practice, the film helped to inaugurate a cycle of city neighborhood films that focused on local communities. One of the best known, William Miles's *I Remember Harlem* (1980), owed much to Greaves's earlier effort.

Greaves went on to direct a number of biographical portraits of significant figures in African-American history. Two efforts from the early nineteen-eighties were *Booker T. Washington: The Life and Legacy* (1982) and *Frederick Douglass: An American Life* (1984), both for the National Park Service. *Booker T. Washington* is notable for the way it seeks to understand the historical pragmatics of Washington's accommodationist politics, while also continuing to question them through critical responses from a committed W.E.B. Du Bois and a "reporter" (played by Gil Noble) covering his life. These two half-hour films are basically dramatizations, but they also incorporate the limited number of available archival illustrations. (The paucity of visual documentation on important figures in black history is something with which Greaves and other film-makers must frequently struggle, as did Jackie Shearer with her recent documentary *The Massachusetts 54th Colored Regiment* [1991].) At times *Booker T. Washington* and *Frederick Douglass* bear the trappings of their educational purpose quite heavily. Yet they, along with the numerous other government-sponsored films on a broad range of topics, enabled Greaves to keep working and producing films on important African-American subjects—no mean achievement during a period in which projects concerned with African-American culture were receiving little national attention or funding.

Greaves's most recent work in the area of biography is the documentary *Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice*, co-produced with his wife, Louise Archambault. A reporter who developed her craft in Memphis, Tennessee, Wells became an important black leader who knew how to use both the black and mainstream press to support the struggle against racism—particularly lynchings—and to fight for women's suffrage. She realized that newspapers could mobilize citizens to boycott either specific businesses or whole towns which failed to acknowledge their patronage with appropriate services and legal due process. Again Greaves encountered a paucity of visual documentation: fewer than 15 photographs of this courageous, militant woman survive, and almost all are formal portraits. Yet the film-maker succeeds in shaping these limited materials into a masterful film. Toni Morrison reads movingly from Ida Wells's autobiography, which functions not unlike a protracted interview with Wells herself. In all these biographical documentaries, Greaves explores the possibilities and responsibilities of leadership within the black community. He investigates the parameters within which these individuals operated and the social and economic forces to which they were attuned and which they mobilized. Biography is used as a way of presenting African-American history to both a general audience and, more specifically, the black community.

These historical portraits are balanced by such documentaries as *Black Power in America: Myth or Reality?* (1986), which profiles a group of successful African Americans working in professions not traditionally associated with black leadership. This hour-long program includes Franklin Thomas, head of the Ford Foundation; June Jackson Christmas, psychiatrist; Clifton Wharton,

chancellor of the SUNY system; Charles Hamilton, political scientist; and Richard Hatcher, mayor of Gary, Indiana. Yet just as the critic is ready to suspect that Greaves has been overwhelmingly preoccupied with the black elite, a film like *Just Doin' It* (1976), an informal *cinéma-vérité* look at two neighborhood barbershops in Atlanta, defeats any such easy conclusion.[9]

Greaves has constantly struggled against being stereotyped in his work—as an actor and as a filmmaker. His work has always displayed diversity: he has balanced his numerous documentaries with repeated forays back into fiction film-making, such as *Bustin' Loose* (as executive producer, 1981) and the never-released, hurriedly made black exploitation feature *The Marijuana Affair* (1974). Furthermore, Greaves has alternated films on contemporary subjects and issues with historical treatments. Films focusing on African-American concerns are countered by numerous films preoccupied with other issues (i.e., *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*); according to Greaves, roughly half his films have addressed topics other than the black experience. Industrials and government-sponsored films that operate within circumscribed parameters are offset by films in which Greaves took large artistic or financial risks.

In many respects Greaves has adapted what is most positive and progressive in Grierson's writings regarding the possibilities of and need for non-fiction films that can inform and educate the public. His approach has differed from that of many leftist or art-oriented documentarians—Barbara Kopple being one example of the former and Errol Morris an instance of the latter—in that his conception of film-making avoids fetishizing the individual work and instead looks to each work as one instance in a larger struggle. It takes a pragmatic rather than a romantic approach, one that has its roots in the black film-making experience —in the race films of Oscar Micheaux, Spencer Williams, and William Alexander, which were typically made under remarkable financial constraints. Yet if Greaves's career, like that of Melvin Van Peebles, resonates with this legacy, it has done so within an entirely new social and cultural framework. This framework, characterized by the end of legally sanctioned segregation (though not of racial discrimination) and by the dominance of television, has altered the very terms of black film-making. Like those leaders that are the subject of some of his films, Greaves has had insight into the changing realities of his time, has persisted, and, often enough, has triumphed.

An examination of the career of William Greaves suggests that we need to rethink our conception and periodization of documentary film practice, which has typically been divided into two eras—the one before the *cinéma-vérité* revolution of 1960 (e.g., *Primary, Chronicle of a Summer*) and the one after. There are other turning points of equal or perhaps even greater importance, not all having to do with technology. The year 1968 can be seen as a watershed, a moment when access to the means of production and distribution began to be more open; not only "Black Journal" but "Inside Bedford Stuyvesant" and "Like It Is" also began to air in that year. These and other initiatives—such as Newsreel, Third World Newsreel, and New Day Films—began to chip away at white male hegemony in documentary film-making. Today, documentarians come from much more diverse backgrounds in terms of race, gender, and publicly acknowledged sexual orientation. Although problems of discrimination and social democracy have not been fully overcome even in this limited area, the manner in which these substantial changes have occurred needs to be better understood. Such historical reconsiderations are particularly urgent at a moment when many ideologues have launched gross polemics against multiculturalism, "political correctness," and arts funding—seemingly to taint if not obliterate our memory of these achievements.

- Charles Musser teaches film and television at UCLA; he is researching a book about documentary representations of New York City. He worked on this article while on an NEH fellowship.
- Adam Knee teaches film history and theory at New York University and the School of Visual Arts. His essays have appeared in *Wide Angle* and *Film Criticism*.

[The impetus for this article came from the Brooklyn Museum's retrospective exhibition of William Greaves's work, organized by Dara Meyers-Kingsley, which ran from 13 April to 26 May, 1991. Most of the films discussed in this article are available for rental through William Greaves Productions, 230 West 55th Street, #26D, New York, NY 10019.]

1. Like many black-cast films, *Miracle in Harlem* had a white director (Jack Kemp)—as did *Lost Boundaries* (Alfred L. Werker).
2. In fact, Greaves was seriously considered for the part in *No Way Out* that launched Poitier to stardom. Greaves's association with renegade de Rochemont, however, may have hurt his chances of being selected for the role.
3. This and subsequent quotations come from the authors' interviews with William Greaves in April and May, 1991.
4. Both stars were hot properties, boasting Oscar nominations for that year: Gloria Swanson as Best Actress, for *Sunset Boulevard*. José Ferrer went on to win the Oscar for Best Actor in *Cyrano de Bèrgerac*.
5. Greaves has recently succeeded in acquiring the distribution rights to this film through his own company.
6. "11 Negro Staff Members Quit N.E.T. 'Black Journal' Program," *New York Times*, 21 August, 1968, p. 91.
7. Because the shows work effectively as unified wholes, the screening of excerpted segments was possibly the only disappointment of the Brooklyn retrospective.
8. Greaves had taught method acting for Lee Strasberg over a 12-year period, and occasionally substituted for Strasberg at the Actors Studio when he was unavailable.
9. Interestingly, Greaves's *Just Doin' It* predates Spike Lee's fictionalized portrait of a neighborhood barbershop, *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (1982), by six years.

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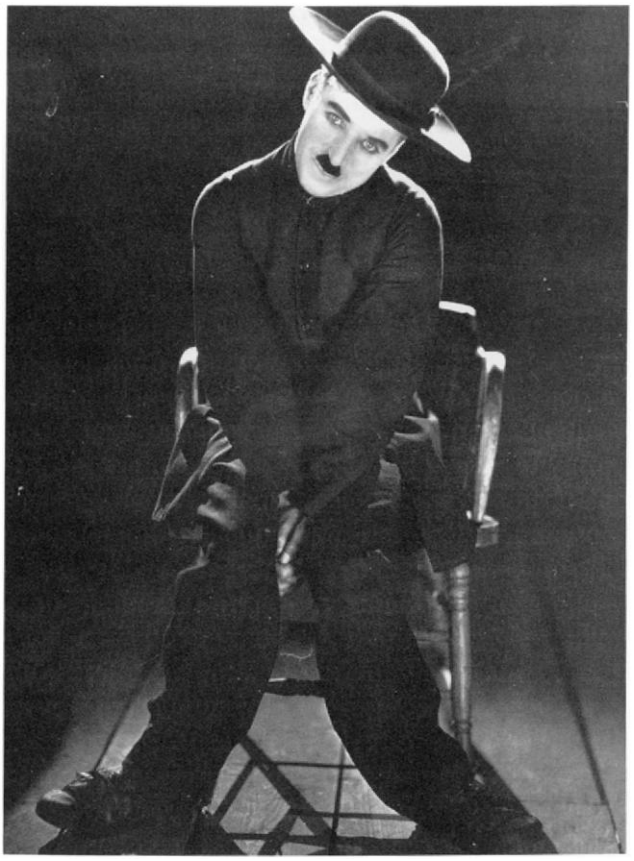

People have often evoked the tragedy of Charlie Chaplin's unhappy childhood. But that was nothing compared to the calamity that assailed him in the midst of his wealth.

—Carlyle T. Robinson

The changes which occurred in Chaplin's films between 1917, when he made the last of his brilliant farces for Mutual, and 1921, when he began to produce a type of comedy peculiarly his own, have never been satisfactorily explained, a lacuna that may be partly attributed to the myth of Chaplin's inscrutability. Even early character sketches by Chaplin's acquaintances depict him as moody, protean, paradoxical, "a human riddle that even a Havelock Ellis might not solve,"[1] a view recently reiterated by David Robinson: "Readers who like . . . post-Freudian interpretations for every action and incident may be frustrated. I . . . think that Chaplin's singular life story would defy the process."[2] Yet these same writers often draw "post-Freudian" conclusions about the effects of Chaplin's childhood and youth on his personality and the content of his films. Such interpretations may be inevitable, for a body of work so coherent and distinctive as Chaplin's, manifestly autobiographical and revolving around a hauntingly iconic central character, could hardly have been produced by a psychological nonentity.

Perhaps the problem is not that Chaplin defies analysis, but that we have never considered his life as an integral process in which later events, particularly those surrounding his first two marriages, could influence his character and work as powerfully as his childhood. The personal crises Chaplin experienced as an adult reactivated and reinforced his earlier experience, producing major shifts both in the Charlie persona and in the tone and psychological function of his films. A study of the period between 1917 and 1930 reveals the fundamental coherence of Chaplin's personality as well as the significance of his chronic susceptibility to depression. Both the development of Chaplin's films and many of his ostensibly puzzling traits—including his asceticism, impulsive risk taking, preoccupation with suicide and the macabre, obsession with control, rebelliousness, ambivalence, and talent for getting into trouble—were related to his depression.[3]

Chaplin's adult crises were largely delayed consequences of a childhood in which he was constantly subjected to inconsistent, sporadic parenting. His father, Charles Senior, an alcoholic music-hall performer, left the family when Chaplin

was a year old. When Charlie was five his mother's failing health ended her stage career and forced her and her two sons to drift into and out of workhouses, poor schools, and the homes of relatives and friends, or to migrate from one lodging to another. After two hospitalizations for physical illness, Hannah Chaplin succumbed to periodic episodes of the insanity that later became a permanent condition. Chaplin ascribed his mother's collapse to malnutrition and nervous strain, but since his Grandmother Hill had a similar breakdown, he often feared that he too would become insane, and that his children would inherit the tendency.[4]

Although Chaplin rarely saw his father, he was far more important to Chaplin than is generally supposed. The fact that he lived and worked nearby, yet barely acknowledged his son's existence, was taken by Charlie as an unambiguous sign of rejection. Nevertheless, when Charlie and his half brother Syd spent two months with Charles Senior during one of Hannah's hospitalizations, he watched his father intently and tried to imitate his elegant table manners for years afterwards.[5] Thereafter he saw him only twice, but these last two encounters induced a rather spectacular attempt at identification.

Shortly before Charles Senior's death in 1901, the 11-year-old Chaplin saw him at a benefit and noticed that he was "breathing with difficulty."[6] A few weeks later they met in a pub. Charles Senior's breathing was still labored, but this time he was demonstrative, embracing his son and kissing him for the first time. When his death deprived Chaplin of further displays of affection, he identified violently with his father, developing a painful symptom similar to Charles Senior's: "For months I went through agony, unable to breathe. At times I wanted to jump out the window."[7] Eventually this asthmatic attack subsided, and did not reappear until 1927, during Chaplin's nearly fatal second divorce.[8]

Chaplin never forgot his frustrating relationship with his father. When an old man came to the Chaplin Studio in about 1926 looking for his son, Chaplin remarked bitterly, "What is it, father love? . . . No father of mine has been looking for me so assiduously."[9] His sense of rejection intensified his self-doubt and fostered an anxiety about marrying and becoming a father himself that contributed to the failure of his first two marriages. His father's absence also ensured that his mother would become a dominant force in his life.

Chaplin idealized Hannah as a selfless, devoted mother and a great artist who taught him the essentials of his craft, but since he was younger and more dependent on her care than Syd, her illness disturbed him deeply. Like many children whose parents become ill or whose families disintegrate, he developed a potent sense of guilt[10] and inadequacy, emotions which he recalled having felt during an incident that occurred shortly before one of his mother's breakdowns. When he hesitated to go to a friend's house to eat, "She turned and looked reproachfully at me . . . ; she was thin and haggard and her eyes had the look of someone in torment. . . . 'I'll go if you want me to,' I said weakly. . . . So I went with a feeling of guilt."[11]

Chaplin blamed himself not only for his mother's illness but for all his family's disasters. Irrational guilt played a part in his painful breathing and suicidal wishes after his father's death and was even more evident in an incident that occurred at Hanwell School when he was only seven. During his first lengthy separation from his mother, Chaplin was falsely accused of setting a fire. Instead of denying the charge and trying to escape caning, a punishment he found "terrifying" to watch, he impulsively confessed:

> "Are you guilty or not guilty?" he [the headmaster] asked.
>
> Nervous and impelled by a force beyond my control, I blurted out, "Guilty." I felt neither resentment nor injustice but a sense of frightening adventure as they led me to the desk and administered three strokes across my bottom. The pain was so excruciating that it took away my breath; but I did not cry out, and, although paralyzed with pain and carried to the mattress to recover, I felt valiantly triumphant.[12]

This was much more than a futile gesture of atonement. By choosing to be caned, Charlie tested his endurance and brought his pain under his own control, strategies he would continue to favor as an adult. He also had the unexpected satisfaction of arousing the sympathy of Syd, who told him later that as he watched the caning he had "wept with rage."[13]

Not surprisingly, Chaplin developed several traits associated with critical disruptions of parenting. These include depression; a craving for love and affection, particularly of a motherly or nurturing kind; feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and isolation; anger, often turned against the self in the form of guilt; and a tendency to relate to others by identifying with them. Chaplin's need for mothering and his knack for eliciting maternal responses, which he himself recognized, were frequently observed. He was often excessively self-critical, diffident, "desperately shy,"[14] and subject to intense feelings of loneliness, even when surrounded by people. His anger was more deeply submerged. Occasionally it surfaced in furious outbursts, but usually it took the subtler forms of sardonic wit, comic horseplay, or guilt.

When Chaplin was angry he could hurt others, but this is hardly unusual, and there is no need to invent a pathological "darker side" of his personality to explain it.[15] His capacity for intense sympathetic identification with the victim, on the other hand, was extraordinary. This trait, which was already evident in his childhood, is vividly depicted both in Claire Sheridan's account of his being "reduced to a state of panic" after wounding a duck,[16] and in Konrad Bercovici's description of Chaplin at a boxing match: "He had picked his favorite and so completely identified himself with him that whenever the man was hit Charlie cried out with pain. . . . When the man was knocked out the little comedian literally fell into my arms. At the door an old friend of Chaplin's said to me: 'He always picks the losers.' "[17]

Chaplin's susceptibility to depression, which is scarcely acknowledged by his biographers, was conspicuous. The word "sad" was frequently used to describe his prevailing mood. Waldo Frank's impression, like that of many other writers, centered on his eyes: "They are sad eyes. . . . No one who sees the eyes of Chaplin could feel like laughing."[18] Chaplin was more than moody; he was subject to cyclical mood swings and frequent mild depressions, which were often triggered by events as commonplace as reading a newspaper.[19] These depressions could be severe and even suicidal, but Chaplin, like the hero of a Japanese play he described enthusiastically to Thomas Burke and acted out repeatedly, chose to conceal this: "The man hiding comes out. . . . The swords went right through him, but as they were drawn out, he . . . wiped them clean of blood. . . . he couldn't let the enemy have the satisfaction of knowing they'd killed him."[20]

Chaplin's desire to hide the seriousness of his depression was matched by his associates' strong disinclination to perceive it. His erratic work habits, fits of melancholy brooding, restlessness, insomnia, "frightful headaches"[21] and general unpredictability—all recognizable signs of mood disorder—were dismissed as vagaries of eccentric genius. Occasionally Chaplin became unaccountably irritable and incoherent, as Carlyle Robinson observed during his second trip to Europe in 1931: "His mind was in an incoherent state. He spoke randomly, without rhyme or reason. . . . Most of the time he was furious with Kono" [Chaplin's valet].[22] Almost incredibly, Robinson ascribed this bizarre behavior to simple nervous strain. Jim Tully, who recognized Chaplin's "acute melancholia," suicidal moods, and desire to hide them, nevertheless insisted that "Cesare Borgia was no more able to take care of himself."[23]

If Chaplin's emotional vulnerability originated in his childhood, so did his methods of coping with it. Shortly after his father's death, he discovered that he could gain both economic and psychological control of his life through art simply by expressing his feelings effectively: "For weeks I wore crepe on my arm. These insignia of grief became profitable when I went into business . . . selling flowers. . . . I would go into the saloons looking wistful, and say, 'Narcissus, miss?' 'Narcissus, madam?' The women always responded, 'Who is it, son?' And I would . . . whisper: 'My father,' and they would give me tips."[24] Art gave Chaplin control, not only of others' feelings but also of his own. By purposely acting out his emotions, he could control them instead of letting them control him.

Art, particularly comedy, became both a means of survival and a form of controlled counter-madness that could subsume or ward off external and internal threats. Chaplin not only understood this but clung to the premise tenaciously. In 1922 he described humor as a "gentle and benevolent custodian of the mind which prevents one from being overwhelmed and driven to the point of insanity by the apparent seriousness of life."[25] Over 40 years later his view had not changed:

"Humor . . . heightens our sense of survival and preserves our sanity. Because of humor we are less overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life."[26]

Chaplin also consistently maintained that comedy was based on conflict and pain, and was therefore a transformation of pain into pleasure, an idea he credited to his friend Max Eastman: "He sums it [humor] up as being derived from playful pain. He writes that Homo sapiens is masochistic, enjoying pain in many forms, and that the audience likes to suffer vicariously."[27] Eastman does indeed use the phrase "playful pain,"[28] and also sees humor as a defense against pain, an "aggressive resignation" in which we "find a special pleasure in disappointment."[29] However, much of his analysis of pleasure and pain in comedy is vague and inconclusive.

Ernst Kris, who was also struck by the "double-edged" quality of certain comic effects,[30] argues more incisively in "Ego Development and the Comic" that comedy is literally playful because it performs some of the same psychological services as the play of children. Just as adults may adopt the strategy of repetition compulsion, deliberately or obsessively repeating painful or frightening experiences in order to master and control them, so children first manipulate playthings and then actively dramatize passive experiences (such as going to the doctor) in order to gain a feeling of mastery and control. Comedy, like child's play, reinforces our sense of mastery, helping the ego "repeat its victory and . . . overcome half-assimilated fear,"[31] as, for example, when people who have learned to walk laugh at a clown who walks awkwardly or falls down. But because the fear is only partly assimilated, comedy remains double-edged, passing readily from a pleasurable feeling of success to an unpleasant feeling of failure. If we identify too closely with the victim in a comic situation—the clown who falls down—"we feel discomfort instead of pleasure."[32]

To put Kris's argument another way, the "pleasurable success"[33] of pure comedy celebrates our victories while denying our fears and failures. Threats are defused by being farcically exaggerated or trivialized, while the inevitable triumph of the comic protagonist is pleasurably anticipated and relished. Since pure comedy provides reassurance at the expense of truth, no master of the form—Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Molière, or Chaplin—has remained content with its limitations. The subtlest and greatest comedy, which tends to be a product of artistic maturity, is remorselessly impure and double-edged, often frustrating the audience's comic expectations and insidiously acknowledging the destructive power of the very forces it promises to contain.

Chaplin's movement from relatively pure to impure comedy is not simple or clear-cut. Even his earliest films contain familiar specters of Chaplin's youth—poverty, hunger, unemployment, menial work, loneliness, humiliation. The treatment nevertheless remains comic, partly because the farce is brilliantly sustained and partly because the threats are predictably overcome by Chaplin's resilient Charlie persona.

Charlie is inevitably simplified in analysis, but the character indisputably evolved as Chaplin matured. In the Keystone and Essanay films he is brash, manipulative, unscrupulous, and more or less impervious to pain. While he is neither precisely malicious nor consistently purposeful, his mission is clearly to subvert order and promote mayhem and destruction. Unlike Chaplin, whose environment assailed him and made him feel guilty, Charlie flouts authority and demolishes his surroundings without a trace of guilt. Although Chaplin experimented with a more innocent, sensitive, vulnerable Charlie in *The Tramp* and *The Bank* (both 1915), he did not immediately abandon the old, quasi-demonic Charlie. At this point in his career Chaplin was experiencing his meteoric rise to wealth and fame, and his exhilaration often infused the character Charles, Jr., called his father's "alter ego."[34] While Charlie exorcised Chaplin's demons, Chaplin prospered.

Chaplin's seemingly charmed life persisted until late in 1917, when Edna Purviance, his leading lady since 1915, apparently began to doubt his commitment to her. Chaplin was fond of Edna, but he was also free-spirited and passionately devoted to his work. During peak creative periods film-making consumed virtually all of his energy, including his sexual energy,[35] and the thought of jeopardizing his success for the emotional demands and risks of marriage did not appeal to him. Still, when Edna found another lover Chaplin was disturbed. His meeting with a giddy and aggressively flirtatious young actress a few months later presumably came as a welcome distraction.

At 16, Mildred Harris was an experienced performer, one of the many teenaged actresses who flourished in Hollywood during the teens and twenties, along with diminutive child-women like Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish, partly because they photographed exceptionally well, and partly because late Victorian and Edwardian men found their air of nubile innocence charming. D.W. Griffith, who had directed Mildred twice, suggested a match between Chaplin and Mildred,[36] but Mildred lacked depth, and Chaplin's limited enthusiasm was already waning when she declared herself pregnant.[37] Chaplin perfunctorily married her, vaguely hoping the relationship might work, only to discover that the pregnancy was false. Soon Mildred actually became pregnant, but the thought of fathering a potentially insane child in a rapidly deteriorating marriage did not console Chaplin. When his first son was born deformed and died a few days later, he experienced what was apparently his first "terrible depression," blaming himself for the baby's death.[38] This disastrous marriage utterly disrupted Chaplin's life, reviving memories of failed family relationships, inflicting severe depression, and magnifying his guilt to the point where it became persecutory and unmanageable. For over a decade it would continue to affect his personal relationships and films.

The impact of Chaplin's marriage is immediately evident in *Sunnyside* (1919), a problematic and curious film in which Charlie, intead of deftly parrying disaster, seems hopelessly trapped in a pastoral idyll from Hell. In *Sunnyside* the dutifully submissive Charlie is subjected to an endless stream of indignities. He is repeatedly and viciously kicked out of bed by his sanctimonious boss, thrown into a stream by a cow and knocked unconscious, thrashed back into consciousness, and coldly rejected by his girlfriend. Even his brief escape into an Arcadian dance with woodland nymphs ends in disaster, for he sits on a cactus and spends most of the rest of his fantasy frantically trying to dislodge the thorns. Finally Charlie strides grimly into the path of an oncoming car, beckons impatiently to it, bends over, sticks his fingers in his ears, and braces himself for oblivion. His posture is ridiculous, but his suicidal impulse is far too genuine to be funny.

Sunnyside

Sunnyside is one of Chaplin's least satisfying films, an eloquent instance of failed comic transformation, but it is an important transitional work. It contains his first Charlie who is not merely poor and scorned, but overwhelmed by the absurd cruelty of life. Since effective active resistance is impossible, he resorts to passive submission to appease the furies, just as he had done at Hanwell. Although Charlie's sufferings in this film are unredemptive and purposeless, mere installment payments on the sin of being alive, his relative passivity evidently suited Chaplin's new mood. In the great films which followed *Sunnyside*, Chaplin transformed this passive submission into passive resilience, creating a more profoundly human character whose greatest strengths lie not in his power to evade, manipulate, or retaliate but in his capacity to love, sacrifice, and endure.

Chaplin quickly regained control of his art in *The Kid* (1920), a landmark in his personal and professional development. Both his sudden interest in Jackie Coogan and the film's pivotal episode, in which the Tramp finds an abandoned baby, can be traced to Chaplin's grief and depression following his son's death, yet this ostensibly transparent denial of loss is not so simple as it seems. The Kid is first lost by his mother, who contemplates suicide after abandoning him, before the Tramp can find him; the Tramp in turn loses the Kid, which inspires his dejected and vaguely suicidal dream of heaven; and the Kid loses both parents, reacting to his separation from the Tramp with graphic expressions of distress. Rather than denying the pain of loss, the film studies it intently from various perspectives, embracing it with startling emotional honesty and realism.

Compared to Chaplin's earlier films, *The Kid* shows striking gains in ethical and psychological subtlety. Unlike previous Charlies, who took risks and made sacrifices only for pretty girls, the bewildered Tramp finds himself facing a long-term commitment to another person who has nothing obvious to offer in return—a tiny, undifferentiated being whose sex he has not yet determined. When he finds the mother's note and decides to keep the baby, still not knowing its gender, a nobler Charlie capable of a wider range of emotion has begun to emerge from the dead skin of the old one.

Chaplin's new Tramp is capable of unselfish attachment, takes fewer risks, uses less force, and endures pain without succumbing to it,[39] refinements illustrated in his confrontation with the Bully. The Tramp first tries to avoid a fight but is grabbed by the hair, dragged sideways through a window, spun around and shaken vigorously—still by the hair. He tolerates this manhandling stoically, blinks when released (yes, it did hurt), picks up a brick, but thinks better of using it. Later, he nimbly ducks two of the Bully's clumsy punches, then thumps him over the head with the brick. The third time, however, he merely shrugs and walks away. Similarly, after punching a policeman off the roof and tumbling the orphanage official out of his truck, he is content to intimidate the driver. His restraint contrasts sharply to the old Charlie's predilection for overkill.

If the Tramp seems vaguely Christlike in his forbearance and his willingness to make sacrifices for the Kid, Chaplin probably intended the parallel. Certainly *The Kid* contains more explicit and extensive Christian allusion and imagery than any other Chaplin film except *The Pilgrim* (1922). As the film opens, a still of Christ bearing the cross is intercut with shots of the Woman carrying her child; similarly, in a scene Chaplin later cut while preparing the sound version—along with the scene of the Woman contemplating suicide—a window lights up behind the Woman to create a halo effect. Later these allusions become playfully ironic. The Woman's earnest sermon on turning the other cheek only provokes more conflict, while the Tramp's dream of Heaven deftly travesties the familiar Christian sequence of innocence, temptation, sin, redemptive death or crucifixion (the Tramp is shot down by a celestial policeman), and resurrection (the Tramp wakes back up on earth).

This semiserious association of Charlie with Christ might at first seem contradictory, for during the nineteen-twenties Chaplin occasionally proclaimed himself as an atheist and dared God to strike him dead, sometimes capping this playful blasphemy with a convincing enactment of divine retribution.[40] However, Chaplin did not let his agnosticism interfere with his keen interest in Christ, which resembled his fascination with Napoleon. Just as this last interest had originated in his mother's suggestion that his father looked like Napoleon, Chaplin formed another pattern of association during his childhood in which certain Christlike qualities—self-sacrifice, martyrdom, and

innocent victimization—were transferred to his mother and ultimately to himself.

Chaplin's mother unwittingly encouraged this transference through her spontaneous playacting, which included roles such as "Mercia, with divine light in her eyes, going into the arena to be fed to the lions."[41] Once, when Chaplin was home sick in bed, she dramatized highlights of the New Testament, climaxing her performance with the crucifixion and Jesus' cry, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The empathic Charlie, who also felt forsaken by his father, startled Hannah by announcing that he would like to die immediately and be with Jesus. Hannah, Chaplin observes dryly, "was not so enthusiastic. 'Jesus wants you to live first and fulfill your destiny here,' she said."[42]

This impulsive identification with Jesus, whose voluntary suffering brought absolution of guilt, would in a sense become Chaplin's artistic and personal destiny as an adult. Beginning with *The Kid*, the repetitions of painful childhood experiences which Chaplin had previously treated comically were not only dramatized more seriously but also began to invade his personal life. Soon after arriving in London for the premiere of *The Kid*, Chaplin returned to his old neighborhood of Kennington and other scenes of his childhood. While he knew that such visits were essentially a "connecting . . . with misery,"[43] he continued to repeat them into old age. During his second trip to England for the premiere of *City Lights* in 1931, he impulsively visited Hanwell School, the scene of the voluntary caning. Although he returned to his hotel in a "pitiable" state and wept for an hour afterwards,[44] he later described the visit to Burke as "the greatest emotional experience of his life."[45] When Burke objected that it must have been fearful, Chaplin "said excitedly that it *had* been fearful, but that he liked being hurt."[46]

The Kid also marks the approximate beginning of another repetitious habit—Chaplin's extreme perfectionism, which primarily manifested itself in obsessive retakes. While Chaplin was always persistent in seeking a desired effect, his early films were produced far too rapidly to permit such extravagant self-indulgence. To the alarm of his distributor and exhibitors, Chaplin took his time with *The Kid*, making it longer and more elaborate than his previous films and doing considerable retaking. In *A Woman of Paris* (1923) and other subsequent films his retaking sometimes became so intense that even sympathetic admirers were baffled by his maddening and seemingly tireless persistence.

This persistence was fueled by Chaplin's superabundant nervous energy, which made him constantly active and restless during periods when he was free of depression, enabling him to dominate every phase of film-making and sustain rushes of creative intensity for days, as he sometimes did in around-the-clock cutting and recording sessions. However, these bursts of energy masked fatigue rather than preventing it, and after the making of *The Kid* the tenor of his exertion shifted subtly. Film-making became less of a challenge and more of an ordeal in which he constantly pushed himself to and beyond his limits. Charles, Jr., grasped the asceticism of Chaplin's devotion to work, observing that he "beat himself unmercifully during production," often arriving home too tired to walk.[47] Other writers describe him in similar states of exhaustion from the nineteen-twenties onward. In 1922, Burke observed that he worked "furiously, as a man works when seeking distraction or respite from his troubled inner self."[48] Conversely, inability to work was also torturous for Chaplin because he could no longer release his energy or contain his "troubled inner self." When his inspiration flagged, "I would retire to my dressing-room and tell the others: 'I have to go into the Gethsemene.' . . . For several days I would be in agony."[49] Once this agonizing doubt ended, it was back to Golgotha for another grueling round of retakes.

Chaplin's most obsessive retaking often involved scenes which had a special poignancy for him. As Burke mused when Chaplin told him he liked being hurt, "His cold-blooded nature was interested in the throbbing of the neuralgia and the effects of the throbbing. He loves studying himself."[50] The early scene in *City Lights* (1931) in which the blind Flower Girl offers Charlie a flower haunted Chaplin for months, occasioning hundreds of retakes. His anxiety focused on this scene for several reasons,[51] but since he was especially dissatisfied with the way Virginia Cherrill handled the flowers, the fact that the scene so directly recalled his own flower selling after his father's death can hardly be ignored. Cherrill had the im-

City Lights: Chaplin with the blind Flower Girl (Virginia Cherrill)

pression that Chaplin *was* the blind Flower Girl when he acted out the scene for her, and, in a way which she could not possibly have imagined, so he was.

For an actor, of course, the ultimate dramatic experiment in voluntary suffering and passive resilience would be to play Christ, a possibility Chaplin entertained for over a decade. He first expressed interest in the part in 1924, when First National acquired the rights to Giovanni Papini's *Life of Christ*.[52] First National feared a fundamentalist backlash, but Chaplin was not deterred. Sadakichi Hartmann's *The Last Thirty Days of Christ*, a playful demystification of the New Testament privately published in 1920, intrigued him, and he considered various possible treatments of the subject.[53] However, since a radically revisionist interpretation of Christ would surely antagonize part of his audience, it was more prudent to continue working with Charlie rather than appropriate a convention-bound icon "deformed by tradition."[54]

Chaplin accordingly resumed his experiments with Charlie in *The Gold Rush* (1925), exposing him to more serious dangers, to which he responds even less aggressively than in *The Kid*. As in the earlier film, Chaplin accomplished this partly through a subtle fusion he called dramatic comedy, creating realistic characters and placing them in a frigid white wasteland where threats are no longer broadly farcical. Charlie negotiates this hostile environment partly through luck, wit, and agility, but his ability to abide the fury of man and nature and, rather literally, hang on by his fingernails is now crucial.

Charlie's endurance is tested not only by hunger and freezing cold—which he braves without overcoat or boots—but also by the bullying of

Black Larson, Big Jim, and Jack Cameron. For the most part he meekly tolerates the giants who surround him, slipping cheerfully into the subservient roles of Big Jim's cook and housemaid, or Hank Curtis's valet and cabin sitter. However, his forbearance is partly a matter of restraint, for he fells the bear that invades Big Jim's cabin with one shot. A less forgiving Charlie might have dropped the bearlike, anthropophagous Big Jim as readily as the bear. In general, Charlie finds the bulging macho males less trying than the tantalizing Georgia, whose indifference and insensitivity pain him. However, unlike his more elemental predecessors in *The Tramp* and *The Bank* (1915), he is too deeply engaged and too oppressively isolated to shrug off his disappointment and walk away. Even hopeless love is better than the cold, bleak void outside the dance hall.

At first Chaplin was quite satisfied with *The Gold Rush*, rewarding Charlie's tenacity and devotion with girl, gold, and two handsome full-length coats, but he pointedly avoided such affirmative endings in later films. He also altered *The Gold Rush* significantly soon after its release, cutting a final scene in which Charlie enthusiastically kisses Georgia, jauntily dismissing the newspaper photographer's complaint that he has spoiled the picture. Instead Chaplin faded out on a more restrained and equivocal shot of Charlie and Georgia walking away from the camera hand in hand—the ending found in most silent prints of the film as well as in the sound reissue of 1942.[55] This growing preference for negative or ambiguous endings, like his earlier shift from active to passive resilience, again seems closely linked to events in Chaplin's life, specifically those surrounding his second marriage.

Like his earlier mismatch with Mildred Harris, Chaplin's marriage to Lita Grey, whom he originally cast as Georgia, closely followed a disappointing romantic involvement with a more mature woman, Pola Negri. Chaplin met Negri in Berlin in 1921 during a party following the premiere of Lubitsch's *Madame du Barry*. She moved to Hollywood the following year, and shortly thereafter a volatile relationship began which lasted for months, even though Negri exasperated Chaplin and, according to Tully, treated him worse than any other woman.[56] Finally Negri broke the engagement, insisting that Chaplin had provoked her into doing it "to force me to . . . hurt him."[57] Her interpretation is not so improbable as it may seem. Chaplin often invited rejection by provoking people,[58] and within less than a year he turned his attention to Lita Grey, whose power to hurt him was infinitely greater than Negri's.

Given Chaplin's compulsion to repeat painful experiences, the striking similarity of his relationships to Lita and Mildred seems more understandable. Both girls were approximately 16 when he was attracted to them; both had been child performers whose careers, like Chaplin's, were fostered by their mothers; both actively encouraged his interest; he risked getting both pregnant; he was obliged to marry both; and he was hopelessly incompatible with both. His relationship with Lita, however, was more obviously self-destructive. Indeed, the playful seduction of the Tramp by Lita's pubescent Angel in *The Kid* was not only a

wry comment on Chaplin's relationship with Mildred and an expression of his belief that he had been "crucified" by the press for his involvement with her,[59] but also a curious anticipation of the roles he and Lita were to play in real life, as if the potential for repetition were already taking shape in his mind.

Chaplin often initiated repetitions (like his return to Hanwell) on impulse, plunging rashly into situations which could abruptly overwhelm him. This was certainly true of his involvement with Lita. The fact that he had trapped himself into the marriage did not make it any more agreeable, and because of the death of his first son, Lita's pregnancies made him almost intolerably anxious. Work, the only part of his life he could still control, now absorbed him more completely than ever.

After learning of Lita's second pregnancy, Chaplin threw himself into *The Circus* (1927) with feverish intensity. Scenes that involved physical risk or discomfort were particularly likely to be shot repeatedly. He insisted on over 700 takes on the tightrope, some with monkeys crawling all over him, and more than 200 takes in a cage with lions, one of which was so aggressive and unpredictable that Chaplin later claimed the terror on his face in one shot included in the film was completely genuine.[60] This new interest in working with wild animals—bears, lions, and monkeys rather than the familiar dogs and cats of his earlier films—coincided with his tendency to expose Charlie to more serious dangers. While filming *The Gold Rush* he had forced himself to make numerous retakes with the bear, but in *The Circus* the stakes rose sharply. Still, Chaplin was never reckless on camera; the calculated risks and pain of physical comedy were a triumphant dance, an elaborate game through which he could manage his anxiety and guilt effectively and safely.

The Circus: the pain of comedy

If Chaplin's second marriage was a form of self-induced "mental torture,"[61] the divorce was even worse. Chaplin was determined to resist an exorbitant settlement. Lita's lawyers retaliated by employing exceptionally vicious tactics transparently designed to damage his reputation and ruin his career. Chaplin was sensationally accused of trying to corrupt his young wife by soliciting "abnormal, unnatural, perverted, degenerate" and illegal sexual acts[62]—which were nevertheless normal enough that the complaint wisely refrained from naming them—and of infidelity, eventually on a scale which his obsessive work habits, depression, and taste for solitude would scarcely have allowed. Chaplin characteristically avoided rushing to his own defense, slipping out of Los Angeles the day before the complaint was filed on January 10, 1927, and eventually moving into the New York apartment of his lawyer, Nathan Burkan. Within a few days the negative publicity became so shrill that his career seemed seriously threatened. Although he had survived two years of a hateful marriage and a month of legal haggling during which he was forced to suspend work on *The Circus*, the thought of never working again did serious damage.

On January 15, several New York newspapers reported that Chaplin was under suicide watch—a dangerous allegation for a public figure in 1927. Attempted suicide had only recently (1919) been decriminalized in New York, and was still widely regarded as an antisocial and sinful act. Burkan accordingly mounted a vigorous campaign of damage control, stoutly denying the reports and producing a doctor who described Chaplin discreetly as "considerably agitated" and suffering from "a serious nervous breakdown."[63] The speculation ended, but the reports were evidently true. Kono told Chaplin's cameraman Rollie Totheroh that Chaplin had tried to jump out a window,[64] and later he told von Ulm that he had to watch Chaplin constantly for four days and nights to prevent "desperate action."[65]

Public opinion gradually shifted in Chaplin's favor, but his depression persisted for months, assuming a number of disagreeable forms including nausea, loss of appetite, and difficulty in breathing. His weight dropped from 135 to 118 pounds, and his prematurely greying hair turned noticeably whiter. Not surprisingly, his somewhat romantic pessimism, or tendency to view the world as an unjust place "entirely given over to the slaughter of the noble and the beautiful,"[66] was intensified, as was the stoical resignation that marks his mature films. When he returned to work on *The Circus* in August of 1927, "aged twenty years" in his own estimation,[67] a new emphasis was already apparent in the bleak visual poetry of the film's closing scene. The Charlie who watches the wagons roll away in the mist is not so much a man who has nobly sacrificed his own happiness (since he had none to sacrifice) as one who has recognized and glumly accepted his limitations and his fate. He is succeeded by the compelling and almost saintly Charlie of *City Lights*, who sacrifices more, and absorbs more punishment in the process, than any other variant of the character.

City Lights is Chaplin's most subtle and comprehensive essay in impure comedy, his only film in which pleasure and pain are so constantly and inseparably mingled that neither Charlie nor the viewer is ever free of at least subliminal discomfort. This affective tension is established immediately as Charlie is caught napping in the stony, cold lap of "Prosperity" when the statue is unveiled. He looks uncomfortable even before he is routed by a jeering crowd of respectable citizens.

The tension between pain and pleasure permeates Charlie's parallel entanglements with the blind Flower Girl and the eccentric Millionaire. His relationship with the girl contrasts sharply with his earlier romantic opportunism, in which the beauty or wealth of women was the principal source of attraction. While he notices the girl's beauty immediately and admires it impersonally, more or less as he admired a nude statue earlier, it is her blindness that disturbs and intrigues him, drawing him to her with an overpowering sympathetic attraction. Obviously, pain and pleasure are inseparable in such a response.

Charlie's discomfort increases as he makes "considerable personal sacrifice"[68] to help the girl. He takes a distasteful job as a street cleaner to support her; skips lunch to buy groceries and spend time with her; squirms in heroic silence as she unravels his underwear; and, in pointed contrast to the old Charlie of *The Champion* (1915), is "severely beaten" in a boxing match.[69] Meanwhile, his bizarre friendship with the manic-depressive Millionaire is almost equally taxing. The relentless irony of the relationship is epitomized in the gag (first filmed in 1926 under the title "The Sui-

cide")[70] with which the story begins: after Charlie saves the tipsy Millionaire from drowning himself, the Millionaire repays his savior by inadvertently hanging his stone around Charlie's neck and hurling him into the water.

The Millionaire seems destined to play the combined roles of Peter, Judas, and Pilate,[71] for he gives Charlie more than enough money to help the girl, and then fails to recognize him a third time. Charlie, who has just been accused of stealing the money, is trapped. If he does nothing, he will be punished for a crime he has not committed. If he tries to escape, he will risk his life, go to jail longer, and—should the girl regain her sight—probably lose her as well. Logically and somewhat bravely, he tries to make his inevitable victimization count. He takes the money and runs, finally performing—after years of experimentation on Chaplin's part—a totally selfless act.

Once Charlie bolts from the Millionaire's mansion he never doubts the outcome. He gives the girl all the money and wanders back to his old corner to be arrested immediately, making only a token attempt to escape. He enters prison with a defiant back-kick, but emerges several months later looking severely mauled: his clothes are as ragged as a scarecrow's, his irritability suggests equally frayed nerves, and he moves with the pained stiffness and deliberation of a prisoner removed from a rack. According to the strangely somber plot summary Chaplin published in French, he has "fallen into an extreme depression,"[72] an inner state his bedraggled outward appearance might well suggest. Much of the dark, subterranean emotion of *City Lights*—the mute suffering implicit in Charlie's shuffling gait or the divorced Millionaire's recurrent urge to commit suicide, the pervasive sense that the world can always do more damage than one expects—seems to flow directly from Chaplin's own recent experience.

The ending of *City Lights* is unforgettable not because it surpasses the rest of the film but because it epitomizes its central tensions and gives them their perfect and most sublime expression. Throughout the film Charlie has been torn between the opposed yet mysteriously coactive forces of pain and pleasure. In the final moments, as he anxiously studies the subtle play of emotions on the girl's face, he is racked more fiercely than ever, and Chaplin refuses to release him to the simpler worlds of pure pleasure (comedy) or pure pain (tragedy). Instead he hangs mysteriously suspended in a black, noncommittal void, a classic Chaplinesque counterpart to Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross*.

Chaplin's admirers sometimes find it difficult to reconcile his often chaotic personal life during the nineteen-twenties and early thirties with his steadily increasing powers as an artist, but these two seemingly contradictory developments were closely linked. Chaplin's temporary loss of control in his personal life actually *impelled* his obsessive quest for perfection in his films, while his determination to confront and master his pain, often by deliberately inducing it, gave his work a primal emotional power and led to his successful fusion of tragedy and comedy, pain and pleasure—a synthesis he tried to effect as early as 1915. If Chaplin had not experienced these personal crises, he might never have managed his more successful marriages to Paulette Goddard and Oona O'Neill, and if he had not felt compelled to transform personal disaster into art, he would have had little incentive to grow as a film-maker. His career would have peaked in the Mutuals instead of in *The Kid, The Gold Rush, City Lights,* and *Modern Times*, and the adjective "Chaplinesque" would never have inspired Hart Crane's vision of "the moon in lonely alleys" making "a grail . . . of an empty ash can."[73]

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2. David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. xiv-xv.
3. For a concise discussion of the relationship between depression, ambivalence, rebelliousness, and self-directed aggression see J. Richard Wittenborn, "Depression," in *Handbook of Clinical Psychology*, ed. Benjamin B. Wolman (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), pp. 1044-46. Pertinent features of elevated moods are summarized in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edition—revised (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), pp. 215-17.
4. Charles Chaplin, Jr., with N. and M. Rau, *My Father, Charlie Chaplin* (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 11; Brian Epstein, *Remembering Charlie: A Pictorial Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 13; Timothy J. Lyons, "Roland H. Totheroh Interviewed: Chaplin Films," in *Film Culture* (Spring 1972), pp. 261, 283.

5. Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), p. 35. Hereinafter cited as *MA*.
6. Ibid., p. 50.
7. Ibid., pp. 50, 58. Chaplin's time sequence is hazy, but David Robinson's chronology suggests that this occurred at about the time of Charles Senior's death, or shortly thereafter.
8. Ibid., p. 305. Chaplin places this nervous attack in 1925, but a *New York Times* report of May 31, 1927, probably dates it more accurately as occuring two years later. In either case, it was related to his second marriage.
9. Konrad Bercovici, "A Day with Charlie Chaplin," *Harpers Magazine* 158 (December 1928), p. 45.
10. David Aberbach, "Chaplin: Of Crime & Genius, A Psycho-Portrait," in *Encounter* 60 (May 1983), p. 87.
11. *MA*, p. 13.
12. Ibid., p. 32.
13. Ibid., p. 33.
14. Stan Laurel, quoted in David Robinson, p. 78.
15. Aberbach, p. 87; Charles J. Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 107; Julian Smith, *Chaplin*, Twayne's Filmmakers Series, ed. Warren French (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), pp. 82–83, 108–09. The phrase is Maland's.
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17. Bercovici, p. 46.
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19. Chaplin, Jr., p. 99.
20. Thomas Burke, "A Comedian," in *City of Encounters: A London Divertissement* (London: Constable & Co., 1932), pp. 147–48.
21. Pierre Leprohon, *Charles Chaplin* (Paris: Éditions Jacques Melot, 1946), p. 263.
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23. Tully, "*Real* Life Story," April 1927, p. 22, and "Charlie Chaplin," in *A Dozen and One* (Hollywood, CA: Murray & Gee, 1942), p. 15.
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25. Charles Chaplin, "In Defense of Myself," rpt. in Wes Gehring, *Charlie Chaplin: A Bio-Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 113.
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29. Eastman, *The Sense of Humor* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), pp. 21, 24–25.
30. Ernst Kris, "Ego Development and the Comic," in *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: Schocken, 1952), p. 214.
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32. Ibid., p. 214.
33. Ibid., p. 215.
34. Chaplin, Jr., p. 33.
35. *MA*, p. 208.
36. Theodore Huff, *Charlie Chaplin* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1951), pp. 88–89.
37. Ibid., p. 90.
38. Lita Grey Chaplin, with Morton Cooper, *My Life with Chaplin: An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1966), p. 170.
39. Maland, p. 107, observes in connection with *The Circus* that Charlie's "ability to endure pain and grief without letting it destroy him" is one of his "increasingly central characteristics." This trait is first sharply defined and significantly developed in *The Kid*.
40. John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 123, 158.
41. *MA*, p. 23.
42. Ibid., p. 25. Chaplin uses his mother's phrase "fulfill your destiny" ironically near the end of *Monsieur Verdoux*, when Verdoux decides to turn himself in.
43. Burke, "A Comedian," p. 169.
44. Carlyle Robinson, p. 189.
45. Burke, "A Comedian," p. 168.
46. Ibid.
47. Chaplin, Jr., pp. 109, 116.
48. Burke, "The Tragic Comedian: a 'Close-Up' of Charles Chaplin," *The Outlook* 130 (1922), p. 102.
49. Francis Wyndham, "Introduction" to *My Life in Pictures*, by Charles Chaplin (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975), p. 28.
50. Burke, "A Comedian," p. 168.
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58. See, for example, May Reeves, with Claire Goll, *Charlie Chaplin Intime*, fourth edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), pp. 40–42; David Robinson, p. 362.
59. Lita Chaplin, p. 130.
60. David Robinson, pp. 368–69.
61. Carlyle Robinson, p. 141.
62. Lita Chaplin, p. 223.
63. *New York Times*, January 16, 1927, p. 5.
64. Lyons, p. 273.
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73. "Chaplinesque," in *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1966), p. 11.

Reviews

High Heels

Writer/Director: Pedro Almodóvar. Producer: Agustin Almodóvar. Cinematographer: Alberto Mayo. Music: Ryuichi Sakamoto. Miramax.

In a 1987 interview, when asked why in Spanish oedipal narratives the erotic desire for the mother is frequently redirected toward the father and the patricidal impulse displaced onto the mother, Pedro Almodóvar first claimed he didn't know and then went on to describe a forthcoming film project called *Tacones Lejanos*. He said it was about two sisters from the south of Spain who run away from home because their "Bernarda Alba"-type mother frightens them by prophesying they will be guilty of destroying the world. Once they flee to Madrid, their parents perish in a fire. And once they become women, whenever either of them has sex, their mother's ghost appears, which drives the sisters crazy. Finally, they have a duel with their mother's ghost and, after killing her, discover that she was really alive and only pretending to be a ghost. So they inadvertently commit matricide. But, consistent with the Surrealists' hatred of the patriarchal mother, Almodóvar claimed that "the mother's behavior is actually more murderous than that of the girls." He explained:

> The idea of motherhood is very important in Spain. The father was frequently absent in Spain. It's as if the mother represents the law, the police. . . . When you kill the mother, you kill precisely everything you hate, all of those burdens that hang over you. In this film, I'm killing all of my education and all of the intolerance that is sick in Spain. . . . It's like killing the power."[1]

Four years later at a screening of *Tacones Lejanos* at the Directors Guild in Los Angeles, when asked how an outrageous story of matricide had been converted into an equally outrageous melodrama about motherlove, Almodóvar claimed that he had only "borrowed" the title from that other project, which still remained undone.

Yet clearly there was more to it than that, for he had also turned that inverted oedipal narrative inside out. The subversive goal was no longer to destroy the maternal but rather to marshal melodrama's full arsenal of emotional excess in order to eroticize and empower it for those traditionally marginalized under patriarchy—or, in other words, to liberate the maternal from the dreaded image of the repressive patriarchal mother which frequently haunts Almodóvar movies.

Tacones Lejanos (literally *Distant Heels*, but retitled *High Heels* in English) is still a story about a passionate daughter (now a TV news broadcaster named Rebecca, brilliantly played by Victoria Abril), who is haunted by a powerful mother (skillfully played by Marisa Paredes). The matriarch is no longer a repressive Bernarda Alba, but an aging, promiscuous pop singer named Becky Del Paramo with whom the androgynous daughter is erotically obsessed and for whose love she jealously kills two patriarchs—her stepfather and her own husband Manuel (the owner of a TV network and her mother's former lover). As if working her way toward phallic empowerment, Rebecca uses sleeping pills in the first murder (a weapon frequently associated with women) and her husband's little snubnosed gun in the second. As in the original matricidal story of *Tacones Lejanos*, the murderous daughter (a conflation of the two sisters) is sympathetic, but this time so is the mother—despite her narcissicism and adultery. When Becky learns that her daughter has committed these two murders, she comically advises her in a warm motherly tone, "You need to find another way of solving your problems with men," and then adds, as if to counter any lingering phallocentric assumption, "You need to choose your weapons more carefully." Finally, like Mildred Pierce, she's willing to take the rap. But neither of these crimes is punished or condemned.

Moreover, the fact that Becky sleeps with her daughter's husband hardly raises an eyebrow, especially since the daughter has chosen to marry Manuel (Feodor Atkine) precisely because he had been her mother's lover. This marriage enables her not only to finally best her mother in their traditional female rivalry but also to replay the murder-

ous oedipal drama that is represented in the film's prologue (where a freckled little Rebecca kills her stepfather after he tried to sell her into white slavery to swarthy natives in the tropics).

Apparently, René Girard's thesis (which foregrounds the homoerotic backstory of the oedipus myth) also applies to the oedipal heroine—namely, that it is the homoerotic desire to love/imitate/become the parent of the same sex (in this case, the mother) rather than the heterosexual desire for the other (in this case, the father) that really drives the oedipal narrative.[2] In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Kaja Silverman argues that this "negative Oedipal complex" is essential to feminism because it "make[s] it possible to speak for the first time about a genuinely oppositional desire which challenges dominance from within representation and meaning, rather than from the place of a mutely resistant biology or sexual 'essence.' "[3] In other words, it allows the daughter to voice her love for the mother, as is clearly the case in the most powerful feminist oedipal narratives like Helma Sanders-Brahms' *Germany Pale Mother* and Chantal Akerman's *The Meetings of Anna*. In contrast to Almodóvar's previous homoerotic variations on the oedipal narrative (such as *Law of Desire*), this film (like many subversive feminist texts) boldly proclaims that motherlove lies at the heart of all melodrama and its erotic excesses, for it is a passion with primal appeal to all genders and sexual persuasions. As Almodóvar puts it in the press kit, "*High Heels* would be nothing without the powerful virtuosity of Marisa Paredes and Victoria Abril. For me, the greatest spectacle of the film . . . is watching these two animals confronting each other." Therefore, the rebellious patricidal impulse must be redirected back toward the father, who remains a relatively insignificant figure in the film, merely a pawn or minor obstacle in the women's game, and who temporarily prevents them from freely pursuing their professional careers and erotic desires. As Almodóvar quipped in the 1987 interview: "Fathers are not very present in my films. I don't know why. . . . This is something I just feel. When I'm writing about relatives, I just put in mothers" (p. 43).

As in other Almodóvar films, although the patriarchs are soon dispatched, the authority of the police endures to the bittersweet end. *Tacones Lejanos* also adopts the mother/police dyad that Almodóvar mentioned in the 1987 interview. But instead of making the police a patriarchal mother like Bernarda Alba, Almodóvar creates a maternal police detective called Judge, who doubles as a female impersonator named Femme Lethal. With this false persona, he not only specializes in imper-

Motherlove: *High Heels'* Marisa Paredes (right) with Victoria Abril

sonating Rebecca's mother on stage but also succeeds in impregnating Rebecca in his dressing room. As if that weren't sufficiently confusing, this protean figure also masquerades as a drug addict and other informants fabricated for his various police investigations. Given this endless chain of impersonations, even his role of detective becomes suspect—especially since he wears a false beard and appears to be a mild-mannered young bachelor named Eduardo living with his bedridden mother, an ineffectual repressive matriarch who imagines she has AIDS (as if she believes it's the modern version of the Theban plague) and with no father in sight. His perpetual slippage of identity is heightened by the casting of Miguel Bosé, a well-known Spanish pop singer and sexual icon. Clearly Bosé's symbolic function in the oedipal narrative is not to be a seductive or castrating patriarch like Laius or Creon but rather an androgynous hybrid like the mysterious Sphinx and the protean seer Tiresias, who both poses and solves the narrative enigmas. Yet instead of being an obstacle to the oedipal hero or testifying to his guilt, this investigator falls in love with the oedipal heroine and insists on her innocence under patriarchy—even when he discovers that she deliberately murdered her husband and father.

After tracing Almodóvar's representations of policemen from the odious villain in his debut feature, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*, 1980) to the sympathetic spectators in the closing scene of *Law of Desire*, Marvin D'Lugo concludes that Almodóvar increasingly positions the law to "valorize murder, gay love . . . and other acts that defy . . . the old Spain." He claims that "the characterization of the police begins to undergo a transformation in *What Have I Done?* where Polo, an impotent police detective who keeps crossing Gloria's path, turns out to be the on-screen witness and authenticator of the heroine's actions.[4] It obviously reaches a new stage of inversion in *Tacones Lejanos*, where not only is the glamorous androgynous hero a cop but where virtually all policemen are tenderhearted souls who identify with those marginalized under patriarchy. In this way, Almodóvar subverts dominant ideology by realigning the center with the marginal.

Along with the title, the film version of *Tacones Lejanos* also retains the central importance of the audio fetish, which is grafted over the traditional visual fetish of the woman's shoe (popularized on screen most notably by Almodóvar's Spanish predecessor, Luis Buñuel). Even though its reverberations are somewhat diminished in the translation from the Spanish title "Distant Heels" to the English "High Heels," the audio fetish dominates the primal scene. In 1987, Almodóvar said:

> I remember when I was a child, it was a symbol of freedom for young girls to wear high heels, to smoke and to wear trousers. And these two girls are wearing heels all the time. After running away, the two sisters live together, and the older remembers that she couldn't sleep until the moment that she heard the sound of distant heels coming from the corridor (p. 43).

In this film, this memory is eroticized and attributed to Rebecca. It is also paired with a primal tale of poverty (evocative of vintage maternal melodramas like *Stella Dallas*) told by her mother Becky, who replaces the missing sister. As an impoverished child of janitors, Becky watched the well-heeled feet of bourgeois passersby which could be seen through the window of her humble basement flat—a space that she nostalgically reappropriates, redecorates, and reoccupies (just as her daughter compulsively replays the murderous oedipal narrative). In the passionate scene in the family basement where Rebecca describes her aural memory to her mother (like a lover confessing her love), we actually witness how the daughter's primal story appropriates the fetishized visual images from her mother's earlier memories, which are still visible through the basement window in the background but which now acquire new erotic associations with motherlove. This familial fusion of fetishistic fantasies is quite fetching.

The power of the audio fetish is also strengthened by giving both daughter and mother oracular professions that rely on their voice and by implying that their speech is connected with their status as sexual subjects pursuing their own desire. Both use the airwaves, ordinarily controlled by the patriarchy, to address their passion to a privileged female listener. In one hilarious scene, Rebecca nervously flubs the news, giggling at disasters because she thinks her mother may be listening; clearly, it is her mother who is both Model and Other, the privileged spectator for whose loving

gaze and sympathetic ear she always yearns. Yet the TV network and its hardware are owned by her husband Manuel, who has hired both her and his current "bimbo" Luisa (Lupe Barrado) to do the evening news. Rebecca succeeds in dismantling his power over the airwaves, not only by murdering him but also by using his medium to broadcast her "live" confession nationwide. Conversely, her more conventional rival Luisa, who had sex with Manuel shortly before he was murdered, is forced into silence: she stands by Rebecca, signing the news for deaf viewers, fearful that her impersonation of a deaf-mute will be misread as the real thing, or that the confession of murder will be misinterpreted as her own.

Almodóvar claims that Rebecca's TV confession was the germinal idea for (what he calls) this "tough melodrama," as well as its "emotional high-point."

> Television is a medium I hate but what Rebecca does on the news program is something I've dreamed about a lot: after reading the news of a death, the presenter confesses that she is the culprit and gives all the details with complete naturalness. But the real key to the scene was what follows . . . she goes on to show the news audience an envelope of ordinary looking photos, explaining that after the murder she photographed all the objects she shared in common with the victim, punishing herself with the terrible awareness that, from now on, their only meaning would be as memories.

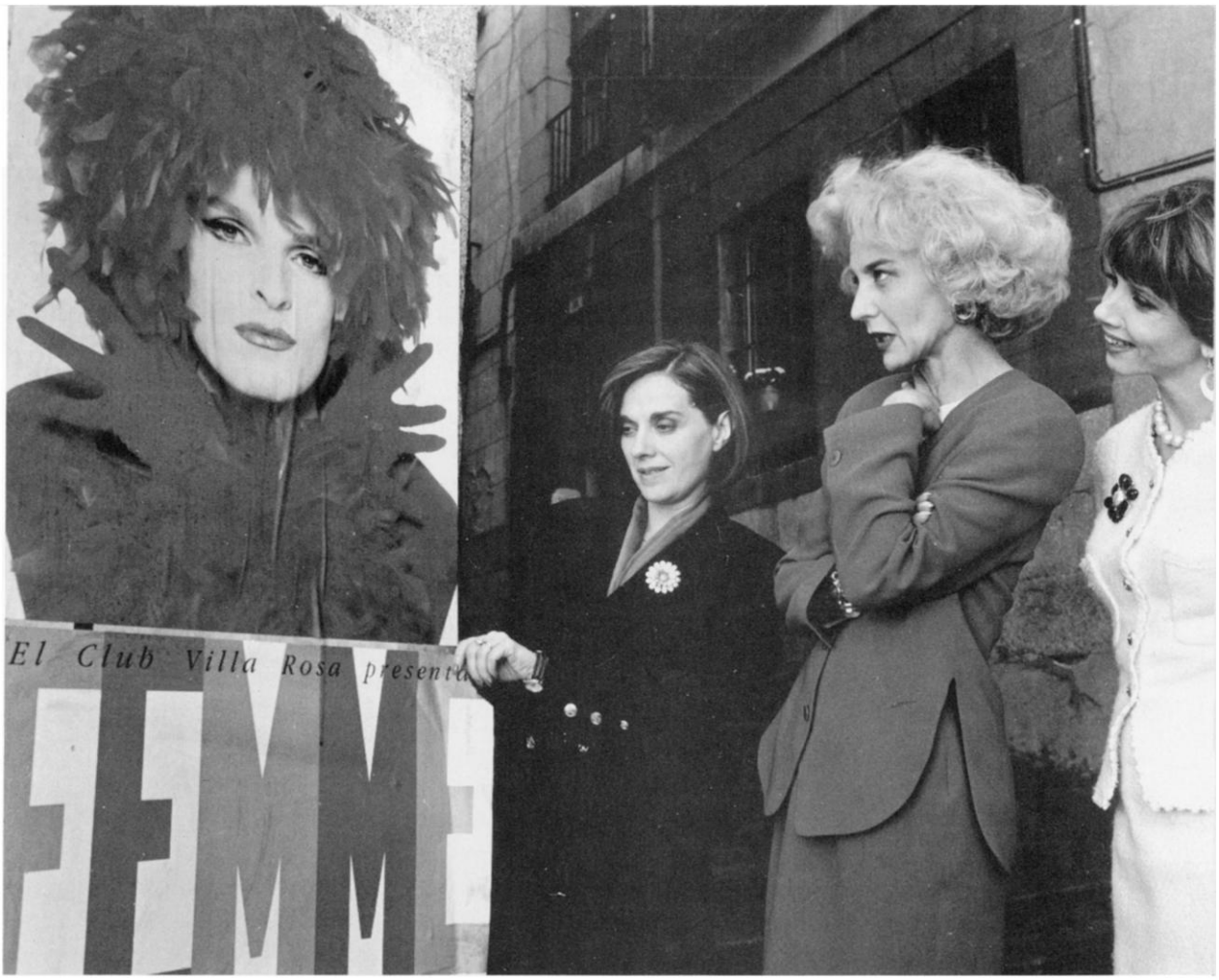
She turns these frozen photographic images into fetishistic substitutes for her dead husband (a strategy of the masochistic aesthetic, at least according to Deleuze), but he turns out to be merely a secondary fetish for motherlove.

The voice of sexuality is strongest in Becky, whose masochistic torch songs (actually performed by Luz Casal) are primarily addressed to her tormented daughter. This is particularly true when she dedicates the heart-wrenching "Think of Me" to Rebecca, who is temporarily in prison for the murder of her husband. Rebecca is so disturbed by this song that she tries to buy the radio (the patriarchal apparatus on which it is being transmitted) so that she can turn off its erotic force. Not only are these musical numbers particularly appropriate to the romantic excesses of *melo*-drama (as Thomas Elsaesser and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith have persuasively argued),[5] but they are also resonant in the context of the new feminist theorization of sound, particularly in the work of Kaja Silverman and Amy Lawrence, who have emphasized the importance of the maternal voice in subject formation.[6]

As Almodóvar observes in the press kit, "Rebecca and her mother act behind the back of the law of man and that of God (a Catholic God as we understand it in Spain)." And this act of subversion is achieved primarily by fetishizing the maternal voice (which is amplified not only through media transmission and hardware but also through dubbing and impersonation). In this way, it succeeds in replacing the unspoken Name-of-the-Father and the hollow voice of God.

The subversive potential of the maternal voice under patriarchy—and more specifically within a hybridized musical melodrama—becomes most compelling in two brilliant comic scenes where the gender of the maternal performer is most ironically compromised through a dazzling chain of masquerades. In one scene, sexy transsexual actress Bibi Andersen leads an extravagant musical number in the women's prison yard. This statuesque beauty plays an authentic "idealized" mother who has broken into prison (by nearly killing a cop with a brick) so that she can protect her beloved daughter. Thus (like Bosé) Bibi performs a triple impersonation—of a woman, a mother, and a criminal —a performance that mocks the symbolic order of the patriarchy and dissolves the boundaries between allegedly incompatible genders and genres (the women's prison picture and the musical). It also implies that the opposition between outlaw/lawman is as arbitrarily constructed and gendered as that between female/male, and that the boundaries between both sets need to be transgressed as thoroughly as those between genres.

Although the genres hybridized in *Tacones Lejanos* are limited primarily to the maternal realm of melodrama, the film's intertextuality is pointedly international. There is an explicit reference to *Autumn Sonata* when Rebecca tells her mother how much they resemble (Ingmar/Ingrid) Bergman's talented mother artist and her mediocre daughter. There are also parallels to Hollywood's celebrity versions of that genre like *Mommie Dearest* and *Postcards from the Edge*, and many implicit allusions to classical mother/daughter



Femme Lethal: Miguel Bosé as the object of the female gaze

weepies like *Mildred Pierce* and *Stella Dallas* and to Hitchcock's latent lesbian thrillers *Marnie* and *Rebecca* (particularly through the doubling of the name for the mother and daughter). There are even a few allusions to Spanish classics, like Juan de Orduña's popular musical melodrama *El último cuplé* (*The Last Song*, 1957), where an aging popular singer makes a comeback and collapses on stage in midsong, and Edgar Neville's *El crimen de la calle de Bordadores* (*Crime on Bordadores Street*, 1946), where the mother similarly saves the daughter she once abandoned by falsely confessing to a murder on her deathbed. And, of course, there are echoes of earlier Almodóvar hits, like *Entre tinieblas* (*Dark Habits*, 1983), where extravagant Mexican boleros are similarly used to fetishize an erotic passion between two women (a torch singer doing Gilda and a smitten Mother Superior), or *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, 1984), where another sympathetic woman gets away with killing her husband, or even *La Ley del deseo* (*The Law of Desire*, 1986), where Bibi Andersen plays not a "real" model mother (as in this musical interlude) but a real bad mother model who (like Becky) runs off to a foreign country with a lover, leaving her daughter behind.

The other comic musical performance in *Tacones Lejanos* is the most brilliant sequence in the film. It's the scene where Rebecca takes her mother and husband to the Club Villa Rosa to see Femme Lethal do an impersonation of Becky. The chain of simulations is dazzling, for the impersonator is really a male pop star (Miguel Bosé), doing an impersonation of an ordinary man (Eduardo), doing an impersonation of a detective (Judge), doing an impersonation of a female impersonator (Lethal), doing an impersonation of a female pop singer (Becky), who is there in the audience with daughter (Rebecca), who has been impersonating her mother all her life. When the camera cuts to a reverse shot of the spectators, we see that Becky watches the performance with narcissistic fascination, Rebecca with erotic desire, and Manuel with hostility and contempt. Meanwhile, three other anonymous female spectators sing along with Lethal, imitating his every gesture and taking great pleasure in impersonating the impersonator.

Whenever we cut back to the transvestite, we notice that he is performing against a painted backdrop decorated with images of gypsies and matadors—the old *españolada* stereotype of Spain promoted for foreign consumption which Almodóvar's postmodernist transsexuals have come to replace in the post-Franco era. This image takes on even greater irony when we recall that Bosé is the offspring of the famous union between Italian actress Lucia Bosé (the beautiful star of the landmark Spanish film *Death of a Cyclist*, 1955, which mocked that bullfighting stereotype) and Spanish matador Luis Miguel Dominguin (who embodied it), as well as the godson of Pablo Picasso (who helped popularize it worldwide). As in a palimpsest, one national stereotype (or generation or genre) is grafted over the other—just as the sound fetish is mapped over the visual fetish. This constant slippage of meaning evokes not only the endless chain of simulations that characterizes postmodernism but also the endless chain of substitutions and fetishization that characterizes primary process thinking.

After this dazzling performance, when Lethal finally meets Becky, he proposes that they exchange mementos—one of her hoop earrings (like the shell earring she had earlier given little Rebecca in the primal scene from the pre-titles prologue) in exchange for one of his falsies. A "circle" or "conch" for a "tit"—fetishes that all blatantly reveal that their referents come from the mother's body, which is the point of origin for all fetishes (despite the co-optive phallocentric theories of Freud and Lacan). Consistent with Bataille's emphasis on exchange as fundamental to eroticism, this act empowers the extraordinary non-phallic sex scene between Femme Lethal and Rebecca that immediately follows in his dressing room. It begins with a wild gymnastic form of cunnilingus (a sex act that could just as easily occur between two women) and ends with impregnation and a proper proposal of marriage (even though the petitioner is still partially in drag and the petitionee is already married). What is most remarkable about the encounter is that it is simultaneously very erotic and hysterically funny, a combination which is very difficult to achieve but which Almodóvar consistently masters.

It is this eroticized exchange not only between two bodies but between opposing genders and sexual orientations, conflicting tones and genres (screwball comedy, maternal melodrama, and softcore porn), that finally fulfills Rebecca's subversive dream of maternal plentitude—of becoming the powerful sexual mother she so ardently desires. By celebrating the love between mothers and daughters and giving new meaning to the epithet "mommie dearest," *Tacones Lejanos* provides a new erotic fantasy for empowering a strategic alliance among straight women, lesbians, gay men, transvestites, transsexuals, and all other forms of non-patriarchal androgynes. And it adds new maternal resonance to Almodóvar's ongoing project of making the "marginal" central to mainstream cinema, not only in Spain, but worldwide.

MARSHA KINDER

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1. Marsha Kinder, "Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality: A Conversation with Pedro Almodóvar," *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1987), p. 43.
2. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). See Chapter 3.
3. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 124.
4. Marvin D'Lugo, "Almodóvar's City of Desire," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Special issue: "Remapping the PostFranco Cinema," edited by Marsha Kinder, vol. 13, no. 4 (1991), p. 63-64.
5. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama," both in *Movies and Methods*, vol. II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
6. "The mother . . . is traditionally . . . the one who first organizes the world linguistically for the child, and first presents it to the Other. The maternal voice also plays a crucial part during the mirror stage, defining and interpreting the reflected image, and 'fitting' it to the child. Finally it provides the acoustic mirror in which the child first hears 'itself.' The maternal voice is thus complexly bound up in that drama which 'decisively projects the formation of the individual into history,' and whose 'internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation.' Indeed, it would seem to be the maternal rather than the paternal voice that initially constitutes the auditory sphere for most children, although it is clearly the latter which comes to predominate within the superego." Silverman, p. 100. Also see: Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

Daddy Nostalgia

Director: Bertrand Tavernier. Screenplay: Colo Tavernier O'Hagan. Cinematographer: Denis Lenoir. Editor: Ariane Boeglin. Music: Antoine Duhamel. Samuel Goldwyn.

Written by Colo Tavernier O'Hagan and directed by Bertrand Tavernier, *Daddy Nostalgia* stars Dirk Bogarde, Jane Birkin, and Odette Laure as the members of a family. The movie portrays events from the father's initial recovery after a heart operation to his daughter's knowledge of his death. At a first reading of the story line, one might be tempted to categorize *Daddy Nostalgia* as a film where familial relationships are reconciled according to the fashions of conventional, sentimental art. Indeed, James Leahy, reviewing the film in *Sight and Sound*, has judged it "a charming film, but no more." Most reviewers have assigned the film a triteness it does not possess. But even more misguidedly, they have labelled it "uncinematic": a chamber piece for three players revolving around a Paris flat, a hospital, villa, and beach in the South of France, and a gas station on the way back from Cannes. The essential "movieness" of a film does not rest on an expansive number of locations, or on death-defying cuts, or on long tracks of the camera. An analysis of the essential cinematic means of *Daddy Nostalgia* will show how and why the film works to subtle, unsentimental, and heartfelt effect.

Original film-makers may use the principles of editing to refashion time, as Eisenstein does with the repeated smashing of a plate in *Potemkin*, or to remodel space, like the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, or to create a new dialogue between situations, as between the short connecting scenes portraying the shared lives and varying moods of father, mother, and daughter in *Daddy Nostalgia*. Transformed relationships as well as strong sentiments from the past emerge in the film through a cinematic chain where the alternations in time and space between sequences illustrate the changing relationships within the family.

Perhaps the movie has been analyzed and criticized as uncinematic because its cinematic devices are so unostentatious. Tavernier uses unobtrusive means to break down the film into scenes, thus drawing attention to details. Beginning and ending with a slow fade, and with stilled actors within the frame, each scene stands out from events both before and after it. *Daddy Nostalgia* often seems like an accumulation of animated photos from a private album. According to Tavernier, the film "suggests a kind of diary," and like a diary, each entry arouses its own particular attention.[1] The daughter Caroline joins her parents in their villa by the sea after the father's heart operation. Because of the transitions from scene to scene, the days she stays with them remain indistinguishable. Faced with a diary of unmarked time, each sequence retains its own mood and importance in the film. Although scene after scene appears to portray only minor events, the juxtapositions between them create an intricate familial world.

As in a Chekhov play, small details take on a magnified emotional importance. Caroline descends from a bus to visit her father in the hospital. But before her, one young woman steps off the vehicle into the arms of her lover, and they move off together as Caroline walks on with her bag to survey the pier and boats, alone. Also as in a Chekhov play, the number of people in a scene and the relationships between them are balanced as if by a sensitive instrument. An episode showing the parents at home is followed by a shot of the daughter on the beach. One parent converses with Caroline, the next scene shows the other parent—usually the mother—in solitary activity or thought. Unlike Chekhov's dramas, however, in *Daddy Nostalgia* the short scene, and not the act, becomes the conveyor of a particular, almost musical impression or mood.

In the precise arrangement of its structure, *Daddy Nostalgia* shows three people behaving in different ways to each other as circumstances change. The English-born father, French-born mother, and their daughter alternate languages as their feelings vary. Likewise, the film's montage, according to Tavernier, "is not dictated by plot, but by emotion." It balances both the characters' emotions and the viewers' emotions for the characters. For example, three scenes follow one another immediately upon the father's return from the hospital. In the first, the family comes home and enters through the doorway of the villa. The father helps the mother off with her coat as the daughter comes in. Tucked into a chair, the husband grasps his wife's hand, and tells her in English, "I love to see you smile." "Your hands are icy," she answers him in French. "Yes," he remarks, also

Family circle: Jane Birkin (left), Odette Laure, and Dirk Bogarde

in French, "it's the operation." The daughter passes around his chair; he reaches and also clasps her hand, but she pulls it away as she moves past. The scene ends with the father murmuring in the middle of a conversation between mother and daughter. He looks confused and distant, turns away from them and asks a troubled non sequitur: "Is he cold?"

The following scene fades in on the father lying prone on his bed, having clips left from the operation removed from his chest by a pretty visiting nurse. The daughter sits beside him, assuaging his pain by telling him, "Think of the drops of whisky I'll put in your Coke later on." During the brief surgery she keeps holding, then kissing his hand. In the third scene, all members of the family sit within the frame, but in two separate rooms: the mother in the foreground, watching the Pope on television; father and daughter in the background, the father at table. The daughter brings him the promised Coke. The mother, without turning her head, states, "You've been putting whisky in his Coke again." Angered, the daughter comes around into the foreground and out of the frame."You can't leave me alone with your mother and the Pope," complains the father. After the daughter has gone, husband and wife argue about religious English-Irish persecution; to end their discussion, the mother turns up the volume on the TV.

Such a balance of rebuff and solace, tenderness and anger, typifies the flow of the film. In the interplay of hands alone the complexity of relationships within the family may be discerned. The father as object of pity and resentment, as patient and wooer; the mother's solicitous and increasingly isolated stance, and the daughter's changing relation to both parents can be glimpsed in these three brief scenes.

The montage between scenes manifests the changing relationships as much as it becomes an orchestrator of mood. The daughter tucks her mother lovingly into bed and in the next shot breaks her promise to her by sneaking out with her father to a bar. In the bar, the father acts as charmingly to his daughter as if she were a woman to be seduced. "Well, frankly I'd rather be your

lover than your son," he told her at an earlier point in the film. When they travel to Cannes, the father regales and woos his daughter with tales of the past, memories the mother often shared in but is mostly excluded from in the retelling. When father and daughter return home after the pleasant time at the bar, the daughter asks her father about his feelings for his wife: "You do love her, Daddy, don't you?" "Of course I do," the father responds in an assured but unconvincing voice. "Why do you think I stayed with her?" he adds with a slight shrug of his shoulders. As the father once appears truthful and charming, so in the next scene he can appear selfish and insincere.

Besides contrasting separate sequences the film-makers also use editing *within* a scene to establish the changing balance between people. We first see the father in a position of diminished authority, supine after the operation. Slowly his daughter comes into the frame, bending over him, and neither speaks. Then the film cuts to a shot of the mother standing in the hospital corridor, nervously tapping with a cigarette. The film cuts back to the father and daughter, who begin to speak, first in French, then in English—the language they share. The first scene sets up the ailing condition of the father as the center of the film, establishes the connection between father and daughter, and presents the increasing isolation of the mother.

A single scene often retains balanced feelings for the characters by relating two different periods of time: the transformed relationships of the present with the mixed feelings and reflections of the past. The father laments the daughter's leaving, for he says he will have no one to talk to. "But you'll still have Mummy," she argues. "Yes . . . well, sometimes I wonder if we had anything to talk about," the father muses. Flashbacks work in the same way as the father's words, complementing, contradicting, or commenting on present relationships within scenes. The daughter asks the father about the state of sexual affairs between him and her mother. He tells her, "Frankly, my darling, it's the loving that counts." But immediately the film cuts to a brief flashback, with the voice of the father remarking to the mother, offscreen, "Miche, you're the most ravishing creature in all of London . . . naturally, you're French." The heartiness of his younger voice recalls his past vitality, but also calls into question how much love he and his wife truly had for one another.

Very few moments of physical affection occur between husband and wife in the film: the man kisses his daughter, and more often only pats his wife's shoulder or arm. One of the most complex uses of the past conveyed in words arises in one of the few scenes where the parents are alone. Throughout this film, the wife has spoken only French. But here, the husband recalls wartime memories and sings part of the film's title song to her (the film's original title was *These Foolish Things*). "We danced all through the raids," he laughs with her, "we must have been mad." "That was a long time ago," she answers him in English for the first and only time in the movie. "Go to bed, Tony, go to bed." She goes upstairs and he comes to the banister: "You used to say, 'Come to bed.' " Memories recalled become present moments, and one period of time contrasts with another, as shot follows shot. The juxtaposition of past and present in the dialogue is as subtle and as successful as the varying emotions found in images edited from scene to scene.

Father and daughter return from the bar as close companions. But as they clean up the kitchen for the night, the father fiddles with his briefcase. He checks the combination: "The date of my birth, the date of my marriage, and the date of my maiden voyage." In the afterglow of a close father-daughter conversation, a reminder of what mattered most to him alters the tender atmosphere. The last combination marks his first trip abroad, not the date of his daughter's birth. The casualness of the father's egocentricity appears throughout the film. In another scene, he vividly describes his maiden voyage cabin to his daughter—"Full of flowers, like a bloody film star"; yet he does not remember her birth in the same year of his first journey and when reminded, tells her most of the children born in her generation "were bloody accidents." Thus the father charms, but his attraction is inextricable from his self-concern; thus his memories sustain him, yet for his daughter recollections of neglect are mixed in with tales of his past adventures.

A quintessential example of the film's ability to balance the characters' past and present feelings for each other occurs when father and daughter rendezvous at a café by the water. The father entertains the daughter by speaking of an old friend. The daughter laughs, then remembers, in a flashback, her father's rejection of a poem she

wrote as a child. After the flashback, her laughter turns to anger; she accuses her father of leading a "beautiful, selfish life," until he says, "You get angry very easily, don't you?" The movement of mood in the daughter's mind is made so clear through the flashback that many viewers are unlikely to notice it.

On their way back from Cannes, the father asks to read his daughter's next completed screenplay. Reflecting on all her works he has not read, he asks, "I've been a terrible father, haven't I?" Bogarde's slight smile as he asks the question manifests the strengths of his performance—implying simultaneously the truth of his statement and his refusal to believe it: the acting, as much as the editing, preserves the harmony in the complexity of feelings in the scene. Bogarde, Birkin, and Laure in equal measure excel, to use Tavernier's phrase, "in showing pain so lightly." The pains, long-held resentments, and love in the family become more poignant on screen for the absence of shouting or excessive gesturing. The intimacies of emotion on the actors' faces are attuned to the regard of the camera in a film with a sparing number of extreme close-ups—a mark of its distance from cinematic melodrama. When the daughter tells the father, "Well, this accident's off to bed," with the pleasantry masking a wound, and when the mother announces in a calm voice, "If he dies, I'll jump off a cliff," one can observe the unity of acting styles. The actors, as the film itself, work on a principle of subtraction.

Tavernier uses long tracking shots in *Daddy Nostalgia* similar to those that trailed the elusive saxophonist Dexter Gordon in *'Round Midnight*. But here the same unspectacular movement of the camera captures each member of the family in a particular point of unspoken reflection or grief. It follows the father's gaze as he stares over the edge of the villa's garden to the sea below; it encircles the daughter sitting weeping on the beach after she has learned her father will soon die.

Both extreme close-ups and camera movement are used infrequently. For much of the film Tavernier prefers to keep the camera still, highlighting the actors' expressions and the visual details within the unchanging frame. The camera observes the mother watching the Pope or sitting in bed having more frequent recourse to her rosary. It documents the disappointments of her old age without cinematic opulence. In a set frame, she opens a mailbox and takes out a lone advertising flyer.

In one of the last shots, the daughter bids goodbye to her father. Here the juxtaposition occurs neither between scenes nor in the montage construction of the scene itself but solely in movements within the still frame. The mother invites both father and daughter back into the kitchen for a last Coke. Suddenly, unexpectedly, and completely in accord with the tone of the film, the daughter's taxi arrives. The camera films the family farewell through a doorway. Parents and child do not share a parting kiss or any embrace: hurriedly, the daughter goes off to the right. The father stares out to sea, then the mother, coming out from the doorway, approaches, but does not touch him either. She moves out of the frame to the left, leaving him solitary, with his back still to the camera. It is the final image of the father in the movie. The family members separate in a rhythm as delicate as the association of shots in the film up to their farewell.

The last scene with the family together concludes, unsentimentally, the relationships observed throughout the film. The shot of the father approaching death marks nearly, but not quite, the end to familial contact. The daughter returns to Paris to find an answering-machine message from her father: "Just calling to say . . . I love you." The story of the film echoes some of the lines of "These Foolish Things." In his youth, the father had "an airline ticket to romantic places." At the end, in the daughter's apartment, there's "A telephone that rings but who's to answer? Oh, how the ghost of you clings! These foolish things remind me of you." The father's last answering-machine message recalls and complements the mother's call at the beginning of the film which informed Caroline of her father's condition. Yet the song portrays and amends in music what is irremediable in the family's relationships, just as the film's structure captures in related images the complexities in which their involvements abound.

The film, like the song, renders what is wistful in the true sense of the word: in the longing for understanding, if late, and for tenderness, if realized but briefly, before a father's death. But for all his losses, he does not expire without a sense, in Dirk Bogarde's words, "that he is dying having been loved"—loved by his memories of the past and in the present by his once-distant daughter. The last moments shared between the family pass as sadly as night ebbs to dawn over an apartment block in the film's title sequence, or as the camera tracks Caroline walking down a boulevard in grey morning, when she cannot leave Paris at the film's end.

The last shared events in the lives of a father, mother, and daughter seem less like a contrived projection than an authentic pathos achieved through cinematic connections in *Daddy Nostalgia*. Few other films offer as memorable a portrait of the inevitable time parents and children must say goodbye.

GABRIEL M. PALETZ

▪ Gabriel M. Paletz grew up in Durham, North Carolina, graduated in 1990 from Yale University, and is currently an English teacher, writer, and denizen of Prague.

1. All quotes from Bertrand Tavernier are taken from our interview at the Edinburgh Film Festival, August 19, 1990.

Life Is Sweet

Writer/Director: Mike Leigh. Producer: Simon Channing-Williams. Editor: Jon Gregory. Cinematographer: Dick Pope. Music: Rachel Portman. October Films.

At his best, British director Mike Leigh creates epiphanies that movingly capture his complex characters' essential humanness in all their contradiction and nuance. In his previous film, *High Hopes* (1988), the epiphanies are embedded in a satire of Thatcherism and an exploration of English class culture and consciousness. In *Life Is Sweet* these moments are, instead, part of the apolitical dailiness of working-class English family life in a north London suburb.

Life Is Sweet, like all of Leigh's films, was constructed during lengthy rehearsal periods and workshop sessions out of the improvisations of his actors. The naturalness and randomness that result can either get directly to the heart of a character with a stunning sense of truth or slog about in banalities and become lost in non sequiturs. Leigh's films also suffer occasionally from too broad use of slapstick pratfalls and from accents too authentic to be easy on American ears. (There is little chance that Mike Leigh will be following Stephen Frears and a host of other English directors on to Hollywood success.) But Mike Leigh succeeds in creating films with a voice and vision all their own. His vision is shaped in a plain and direct visual style—one lacking the aesthetic and intellectual ambitions/pretensions of a Peter Greenaway. Leigh's focus is on his characters' faces and dialogue, not on creating an imaginative and striking mise-en-scène or indulging in virtuosic camera movements and editing. But this route allows Leigh, in a film like *Life Is Sweet*, to evoke from ordinary life a unique blend of comedy and desperation and to sometimes radiantly transcend its naturalistic roots, giving a bizarre twist to the mundane.

Life Is Sweet is held together by the family at the film's center. The father, Andy (Jim Broadbent), is a procrastinator and dreamer, who hopes to find a way to leave his hated job as supervisor of a large kitchen staff by buying a hopeless wreck of a food van. The blousy, vulgar vitality of his wife Wendy (played by Leigh's real-life wife Alison Steadman) powers the film, literally setting

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it in motion, in the opening sequence, as she leads a dance class of clumsy and utterly true little girls. Her relation to her own two daughters, red-haired twins in their early twenties, becomes the film's emotional focus. The two are neatly contrasted. Natalie (Claire Skinner) has a boy's haircut, is calm and sensible, and works as a plumber. Nicola (Jane Horrocks), a smart dropout, is buried in mussed hair like a sheepdog and is twitchy and demented, full of odd funny gestures of anxiety like squinching up and distorting her features, or vibrating her

Alison Steadman as Wendy (right);
Jane Horrocks as Nicola and
David Thewlis as her boy toy (below)

hands inside her T-shirt, or compulsively patting her cheeks. The film also contains a subplot about family friend Aubrey's opening of a French restaurant on the suburb's high street. (Food is a central metaphor with which Leigh tries to give some unity to the film.)

The film may have little in the way of conventional plot, but for Leigh interaction is all. In long takes and tight, often penetrating close-ups, we watch the family's spirited and warmly humorous way of dealing with Nicola's continual adolescent scowling assaults. She insults her pink-floral-patterned mother, she reflexively snarls "capitalist" and "racist" at innocent remarks, and she insists that all men are rapists. One of the film's wittiest conceits is that her smug, sharp bloke for afternoon kinky sex finally says no to it, wanting just to talk instead, and get to know her as a person. The supposedly feminist Nicola will have none of that. But her behavior seems suddenly less endearingly quirky with Leigh's abrupt cut to her midnight binging on candy, willed vomiting, and the terrible out-of-control anxiety that accompanies the gorging. It is a bold thing to confront bulimia this vividly and realistically. Nicola, however, never seems a grim case history, partly because the caricaturing makes her rather appealing and funny, and partly because Leigh's narrative method involves moving casually from plot to plot, from humor to humor, so that the scene's full anguish is almost tripped over, and then quickly shifted away from again, to a series of sequences about the other family members' work lives. There is no evasion, but the sequence's painful intensity is leavened with images of other people caught up in the flow of life.

Life Is Sweet also includes a lengthy, ludicrous send-up of the upscale end of the eating business —the family's comic, porcine friend Aubrey's (Timothy Spall) opening an absurdly pretentious French restaurant called "The Regret Rien," filled with laughable, shoddy, Parisian-style artifacts. The fate of the eatery is presaged by a prominently displayed tank of dead fish. Though Aubrey may think he's a culinary genius, and though Andy dreams of making a killing with his van, the camera cuts back and forth between them as each drowns his disappointments in wine or pub beer—again the crashing of high hopes.

Here as elsewhere, Leigh's characters are usually mildly caricatured, which gives his work its special tone, a mixture of drollery and poignance. But this penchant for cartooning carries the risk of going over the top, and when that happens, Leigh gives us an Aubrey who becomes tediously silly as he acts out his rage, sexual longing, and self-loathing, or the nouveau-riche sister in *High Hopes* whose hysteria is more grating than emotionally revealing. There is also some danger of sentimentality in work so centered on human emotions, but somehow Leigh never crosses the line between empathy for his characters and mawkishness.

The film's powerful emotional climax occurs in an exchange between mother and daughter, in which Wendy conveys to Nicola her chagrin that the girl has retreated from life and has no joy in her soul. She just wants her to be happy. Nicola, full of self-laceration and despair, only hears that her mother hates and rejects her. It is an emotionally stirring sequence, which ends with tears, an embrace, and the promise of turning over a new leaf. The mother here displays a capacity for nurturing warmth and intuitive understanding which coexists with a penchant for dim, irritating joking and a tense, braying laugh. Wendy is strong, a survivor, as is the family, and the sequence is a luminous example of Leigh's gift for creating privileged moments. The film concludes in a delicately rendered scene, with the two sisters quietly talking together, accepting each other. Nicola returns to the family from her self-imposed exile —but with only the hope, not the guarantee, that there will be an emotionally stable future.

Life Is Sweet provides no closure, just life's flow—of despair, pleasure, alienation, and human connection all intermixed. In the most modest of attached houses, in the most modest of working-class lives, in the midst of dreams terminally deferred, and a calamity brought on by a carelessly dropped spoon, the film does ultimately conclude that life can be sweet and worth caring about.

BARBARA and LEONARD QUART

▪ Barbara Quart has written *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* (Praeger, 1988); Leonard Quart is the author of *American Film and Society Since 1945* (Praeger, rev. ed. 1991). They are both professors at the College of Staten Island, CUNY.

Judy Bloch

A Conversation with Mike Leigh

JUDY BLOCH: *Your film titles have evolved from* Bleak Moments *and* Hard Labour *through* High Hopes *to* Life Is Sweet *and its* "Regret Rien" *café. Does this represent an evolution in your thinking about how people are able to cope?*

MIKE LEIGH: The suggestion that I've gotten more optimistic leaves me feeling pretty uncomfortable, because I think that's simplistic. I mean, if you look at the earlier stuff, the general tendency is to say, by implication, that life could be better, and that's really what *Life Is Sweet* boils down to. But *Bleak Moments* and *Hard Labour* were made by a person in his late twenties, and *High Hopes* and *Life Is Sweet* were made by a person in his late forties—nay, a middle-aged person. In a very personal way, some of my things are plainly pre-parent and some are post-parent. [Leigh and his wife, actress Alison Steadman, have two children.] And as you get older, life is in one sense a lot more complex, a lot less black and white.

I do think that actually making the journey from being a child to being a real grown-up is a pretty tough one. I'm not too sure that I've accomplished it. We grew up in a time—in the forties and fifties—when kids were kids and grown-ups were grown-ups in many cultural ways. And that has eroded in some respects, in a way that's not necessarily helpful. And again, the whole question about how society organizes itself in terms of people really having responsibility for their own lives, having control over their own lives, as opposed to being, as it were, looked after by the mother state, poses all kinds of questions about democracy, about one kind of political system or another.

And I'm aware that one of the prevailing themes in all of the films is the hopelessness of being truthfully what we are, as opposed to what other people expect—what our received roles are. And that obtains right down the line in every single film: in characters like Nicola, like Aubrey, in *Life Is Sweet*, who are receptacles of received notions of how they should be; right through to Wendy's final speech, which says we can just talk about it, be honest and we can really get somewhere.

JB: *You workshop your characters a lot—is it serious business when you're doing it?*

ML: There are plenty of laughs along the way. But it is, in the end, a serious and, I may say, an extremely gruelling and arduous business. To be honest, 20 years ago I found long rehearsals —investigating the relationships, the research— endlessly fascinating, and in some respects I find it something of a chore now. Having said that, what I find increasingly delightful and pleasurable is the process of actually filming.

JB: *Watching the films, you have to keep reminding yourself that these are actors; but there's a sort of paradox in that intense kind of creation of reality: in the end they're not real, they're super-real characters.*

ML: I think that's right. This revolves around a number of different factors, one of which is even the most sophisticated audience's received expectations of how characters in movies behave or are—which is to say, on the whole, not like real people, in behavioral terms. Obviously there are considerations involved which have to do with heightening things—which actually are not heightening beyond what's real. . . . Like when you're in the subway, right up against someone, you have to look at them, though you try not to, you have to see them, hear them, smell them.

It's also the case that we're in the business of not only making people believe and care about all these things, but *laugh*. We are in the business of being funny, and that's not to be underestimated.

JB: *What is going on for you, then, when things take a turn that becomes so extreme—for instance, when the women in* Home Sweet Home *turn into animals, virtually, with their vicious name-calling?*

ML: The point is, that is what *happens* to people. The only way I can really explain anything, in any of the films, is in terms of a real world going on, real life. I mean, obviously I can talk about it on another level, about the aesthetics, the literary style, the shooting style, the choice of visual elements, the juxtaposition of comic moments and all that . . . but in terms of the integrity of what's going on, however high the temperature might go . . . with all due respect, you've been in domestic situations where people scream at each other like that, where they all go absolutely, totally apeshit—I refuse to believe that you haven't. And that's the bottom line.

JB: *Your credit always used to say "Devised and Directed by Mike Leigh" . . . ?*

ML: I think one of the biggest mistakes of my career was to use that phrase, and I wish to hell I had always put "Written and Directed by . . ." earlier than I did. For various historical reasons, I thought because I didn't sit in a room and write it, it was better to say "Devised." Eventually I realized this is the biggest red herring of them all. The truth is that this is a medium in its own right, it's a plastic medium; everything I do that's worth talking about happens in conjunction with the actors. Obviously I make decisions. I have ideas of who the character's going to be, but then it's different from what happens. I create the characters and the actors create the characterizations.

JB: *Do people appreciate these portraits of their lives . . . have you had a positive reaction, for instance to your television work?*

ML: On the whole it's positive, except for the minority of middle-class dissenters who always accuse me of being patronizing toward working-class characters, which I completely reject.

JB: *This is not a complaint you receive from working-class people?*

ML: No. Absolutely not. Never heard of it.

JB: *Do you have a working-class background?*

ML: My father was a doctor and I grew up in a very working-class area, so the answer is, strictly, no, but yes in many ways because I went to working-class schools and have actually lived in working-class territories throughout my entire life. And I'm married to somebody who comes from a lower-middle-class background, so I've always had an ongoing relationship with the very ordinary and prosaic world.

So yes, I would say a positive reaction, but I've slightly lost touch—tragically really, because when [my films] were on television, there was a sort of ongoing constituency that enjoyed them, but they now aren't seen in that mode—and it's so much harder to get to see them because of the perverse distribution system so screwed up by Hollywood—it's harder for me to be clear about that. But on the whole it's positive.

This conversation is excerpted from an interview with Mike Leigh conducted by Judy Bloch, Editor of the University Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive *Calendar* at the Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California, in October, 1991.

Book Reviews

History of the American Cinema

Vol. 1—The Emergence of Cinema
By Charles Musser

Vol. 2—The Transformation of Cinema
By Eileen Bowser

Vol. 3—An Evening's Entertainment
By Richard Koszarski

New York: Scribner's, 1990. $65 each volume.

"My intention is to provide a general background of a kind that will make it difficult for historians more narrowly focussed on a single film or filmmaker or production company to assume that a specific quality or usage is unique to that film, person, or company instead of realizing that it was common to the period" (Bowser, p. xii). "The very notion of a filmgoing experience [in the 1920s] was much more complex and extended far beyond that part of the show which came in a can. . . . To look at the films again without knowledge of this context is to ignore a major part of their creators' original design" (Koszarski, p. ix). "[Enormous changes in film history in the earliest period] raise troubling issues that call for seeing motion picture history not as the history of a product (the films) or of an industry (Hollywood and its precursors) but of a practice" (Musser, p. 495—last paragraph of the text).

Even as they evidence a great respect for norms of traditional historiography, the first three volumes in Scribner's ten-volume history of American cinema show quite clearly the influence of today's new directions in the interdisciplinary study of cultural or social practices. Even as they tell some of the same stories as earlier histories of films (although they usually do so with much, much detail and rigor in the researching of facts), the Scribner's volumes alter that history by an emphasis away from masterpieces, auteurs, films considered as aesthetic objects whose only history is that of closeness to the quality of Art.

Beyond an obvious concern to study texts within production and reception contexts, these books go on to imply even that the very isolation of something we might think of as the text is a peremptory and theoretically suspect activity. Texts are what they are because of the meanings given them by surrounding situations. A history of films is a history of films in history. Charles Musser's goal to understand works of films as parts only of larger practices is really the goal of all three volumes as they show how the myriad groups, as they make and consume films, make use of the films to fill out desires, to concretize new business strategies of the modern age, to inscribe a place for themselves in the contemporary world through the practice of cinema. These books are emphatically not histories of films or not of films alone as fixed bundles of style and signification.

And history here reveals itself to exist in a vast multiplicity of levels: the contexts for film in the Scribner's volumes can range from documents internal to the business operations of film companies (for example, budget sheets) to legal documents that show the shifting governmental definitions of film (for example, legal judgments about the copyrightability of early film images) to public-directed publicity campaigns to exhibition venues to the labors of oftentimes anonymous workers within the film industry. In fact, while the volumes do offer some very close readings of individual films (as when Eileen Bowser offers a shot-by-shot commentary of a sequence from a typical Hollywood feature to show the codification of the new Hollywood rules of storytelling), we witness in the volumes a concern for a film history that is much, much more than a history just of technique and code and form. For example, these volumes are emphatically studies of the making of films, of the labor and technology investments in an increasingly rationalized and capitalized art and industry. While the authors never lose sight of the particular commodity that the film industry set out to make audiences desire, their books also fit today's cultural studies in their attention to the cultural politics of industry itself, independent of product—the politics of labor struggle, of instauration of processes of fabrication (for example, the move to centralized production within the studio system). With a very rich attention to the thick materiality of everyday film practice, the volumes restore much of the hidden history of film—of, for instance, the ordinary work that went on behind scenes clouded in all the glamor of Hollywood lives hyped by publicity machines.

In this respect, what might seem Richard Koszarski's buying into the very myths of the Hollywood film industry—insofar as he offers up chapters (complete with full-page poster or promotion-still reproductions) on major stars and directors—can reveal itself more critically to be a strategy well in keeping with an overall intent of the series. Even as he captures the glitz of Hollywood—something that after all is an integral part of its very historicity—Koszarski balances the radiant

public history with an attention to the seemingly mundane details of everyday labor and to the often repressed large-scale decisions of management. He is less reproducing the glamor of Hollywood than recognizing it and contexting it by its relation to more economic and industrial parts of his analysis. Not for nothing does *An Evening's Entertainment* open with an anecdotal account of Carl Laemmle's voyage out West to oversee the new Universal studio, complete with a description of all the hoopla (but also disasters) that accompanied the new studio's opening. On the one hand, in a meeting up of form and content, Koszarski's anecdotalism finds a method to capture and convey Hollywood's own image of itself as purveyor of dreams; on the other hand, this particular anecdote is also a story of power, of its imposition and spread—a story not usually told so directly by the Hollywood promotional apparatus. The history of Hollywood, we discover, is not just the history of its myths alone or its business operations alone or of its everyday work activities alone; it is a complicated interweave of many such factors.

History here in the volumes can even involve more ineffable forms of evidence, as when Charles Musser sets out to account for the general psychical economy of the early films and their spectators and finds the grounds for this economy in such notions as that of masculine homosocial behavior. Many of the earliest films, Musser suggests, allowed men to come together in leisure—both in the space of the showplace itself and in the films themselves (for example, the early Edison Vitaphone that shows men dancing together before the look of the camera). At the same time, Musser also notes how the new urban art of cinema allowed the entrance of women into a modern public sphere of leisure. At the level of identification and investments of pleasure, the cinema becomes a site for the playing out of cultural and sexual conflicts and redefinitions.

But such discussion of the psyches invested in cinema does not lead to an individualism where history becomes the list of this or that individual reaction. If the volumes are rich in detail, in the local fact, and in hypotheses about the intangibilities of emotional investments in film, these are never treated as isolated phenomena but as parts of larger arguments about history that are always in the process of being integrated into larger contextualisations and totalizations. For example, in Musser's analysis of the homosocial appeal of cinema as leisure activity, consonant with other work on the organized nature of early cinema spectatorship, the psychical economy proposed is seen as a *social* phenomenon precisely, tied to new class alliances, emergences of new forms of the everyday public sphere, restructurings of the cultural organization of sexual difference. In this respect, the volumes offer more than a history of production, distribution, exhibition as they try also to address issues of consumption. Indeed, as Richard Koszarski's discussion of the onslaught of screenwriting courses and manuals (many of dubious value) for the general public suggests, the relation of creation to consumption is double-edged, as audience members are solicited not only to buy the entertainment but to imagine their own active participation in its fabrication. This is the sort of totalizing history that can talk of something as seemingly far removed from the industry as classroom instruction in film (Victor Freeburg at Columbia) but show that in fact the links are direct (in such university classes the codes of a Hollywood aesthetic are rendered explicit and are refined) even though complicated.

Although the history of American film has necessarily to come back to the power elite governing its dominant forms, even the meaning of this most organized cultural form is a meaning relative to this or that specific use of film. For the writers of these volumes, films are framed and reframed at every stage in the process from production to distribution, and in this activity the films can come to take on new identities, pose new implications, not always consonant with the designs of the ruling elite. Indeed, even as these volumes avoid what strikes me as the worst excess of cultural studies today—namely, a consumerist form of resistance-theory in which the critic applauds individual consumers' deliberate mishandling of cultural products—the books do exhibit a quite thought-provoking interest in seeing what socially structured groups of individual users of the cinema can do with such a mass art and business. One dominant impression these volumes offer is that of the ways in which at each and every stage of film practice there was room for modification of the product and of its presentation and meanings.

One of the most striking and productive arguments of Charles Musser's *Emergence of Cinema*, for instance, has to do with a conflict between film producers and film exhibitors as to where the responsibility for meaning-making lies: one way he structures his history is around the increasingly more rigorous efforts by the makers of the films to control meaning and impose patterns of consumption. Here, Musser gives a new concreteness to standard arguments about the development of an early cinema of attractions into a cinema of narrative complexity by demonstrating how one factor in this tradition was the recognition by film-makers that multi-shot narratives allowed less room for the exhibitor to add new meanings to the film: on the one hand, it became harder to break up the film with ancillary media like slides or songs; on the other hand, the very flow of images in a montage meant that the field

of meanings of each and every shot would be limited by the immediate context of other images.

Significantly, such a writing of history as the history of *uses* of cinema has its immediate complement in Richard Koszarski's volume, *An Evening's Entertainment*. Although Koszarski is dealing with the outcome of the battle between producers and exhibitors—an outcome in which codes of narrative elaboration seem to make creativity at the stage of the showing of films difficult if not impossible—he suggests nonetheless that resistance to producer control was still possible at the level of exhibition. In particular, one long discussion in this volume deals with the practice common to many projectionists in the silent period of speeding up the film, whether to make slow scenes more exciting or deliberately to render dramatic moments comical or simply to knock off earlier for the day. As Koszarski's analysis shows, what might seem a merely aberrant and epiphenomenal practice was actually fairly widespread and reveals important conflicts in an industry still in evolution as it approached the coming of sound.

If Musser's volume captures the open flux of earliest cinema where a multitude of textual practices exists without any one in dominance and if Koszarski's shows the emergence of an industry geared to a dominant form of entertainment (even if local practices such as that of the projectionists rendered that dominance incomplete), Eileen Bowser's volume is concerned, as its title suggests, with the forces behind and the nature of the transition from early cinema to highly rationalized, capitalist narrative cinema. Bowser's analysis is simultaneously textual and institutional as she pinpoints myriad factors leading to the transformation of cinema and establishes their tight interrelation. To take just one example, the star system is both cause and effect of other developments in film: for instance, the rise of emblematic shots set off from the narrative and introducing elements in close-up (in this case, close-ups at the beginning of a film that offer first glimpses of the star about to be seen in the story proper); development of new acting styles that make it logical to take an interest in the person who is doing the acting, and development of new techniques that bring this new acting into prominence (for example, the close-up); the efforts of critics to promote a new, psychologically rich cinema; the rise of fan magazines; and the more general legitimation of cinema as an art in which it is possible to think of actors and actresses as centrally contributing personnel.

Undoubtedly and deservedly, the Scribner's volumes will become the standard reference works for the history of American film. But although their sheer bulk, expense, and precision and richness of detail probably means that these books will remain reference works, it would be unfortunate if they were not also read as full and engrossing histories in their own right. The stories these books tell are fascinating (and the authors manage to be consistently eloquent and elegant in their prose) and the historical continuities and linkages are never overwhelmed by the empirical data: these are fully Histories of cinematic practice, not just research guides to film.

But in this respect, I must register one disappointment. It is, however, one that seems endemic to film-historical research at the present moment and not a fault of these particular authors. For all their wealth of information about American film production and exhibition and for all their attempts to move beyond the film process itself to engage with audiences (both the factual composition of the actual audiences for the films and the hypothesized nature of the spectatorial psyche), the volumes in the series rarely give us a sense of American politics beyond those moments when it has immediate consequences for film. American society itself, its values, its progress, its changing structures, simply moves to a shadowy background. When we learn that McKinley was President in 1901, it's because there were camera crews present at the moment of his assassination and the turmoil was captured on film. When we learn that there was a reform movement in the teens, it's because film became a particular target or site of conflicting views for this movement. Social and political history becomes little more than a set of explicit influences or pressures on film.

Of course, no historical study can do everything. Moreover, the connecting of cultural texts to sociopolitical contexts is no easily empirically verifiable matter. But I would like to have seen more attempt to imagine film's place in the national context overall. I think, for example, of the admittedly hypothetical arguments of Lary May in his *Screening Out the Past* (1983): although much of what May argues is fully an interpretation of history—a guess about it—and although his empirical research has rightly been found wanting in many respects (by Douglas Gomery especially), I would still contend that there is something very compelling about his assertion that social and cultural conditions led American films in the twenties to represent a compromise between Victorian strictures and a newer morality based on the cultivation of an energetic and often fully sexed body. May's argument can help us understand how twenties film can be linked to dominant ideology even as it seems to play on images of excessiveness, expenditure, non-narrativity: it is precisely in the ways it no longer adheres to an older morality of sense and saving that twenties cinema participates in the modern culture of consumption. Revealingly, a book like May's does not show up in Kos-

zarski's bibliography and its brand of argument does not seem to have influenced Koszarski's historiography.

No doubt if one wants to suggest possible links between a society and its cultural productions, it is necessary to understand those productions in all their integrity and specificity. This is what the Scribner's volumes do. They give us the totality of existing knowledge and of currently possible research on the early growth of American cinema. They offer indispensable material for us to build our cultural histories upon.

DANA POLAN

▪ Dana Polan teaches film and English at the University of Pittsburgh. He is writing a book called *Professors*, on media representations of academia.

Shakespearean Films / Shakespearean Directors

By Peter S. Donaldson. Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990. $44.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

A great deal of writing on the subject of literature and film in general and Shakespeare and film in particular is unsatisfactory because of an almost inevitable imbalance. Critics are rarely able to do justice to both components of a hybrid form and as a result we frequently end up shaking our heads at how writers so knowledgeable about Shakespearean texts, performance history, and dramatic/poetic conventions can be so woefully naive about film history and theory, or how writers so shrewdly alert to contemporary film theory and the mechanisms of cinematic production can be so undereducated about the subtleties and truisms generated by 400 years of Shakespeare, Inc. But there should be no such head-shaking about Peter S. Donaldson's *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors*, a cutting-edge book in the best sense of the term. Donaldson's background as a literary scholar and critic blends seamlessly with his keen sensitivity to cinematic form and easy familiarity with contemporary film theory and postmodern criticism, and as a result he is remarkably well prepared to face the problems of interpreting a Shakespearean artifact that is both text and film. *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* is by no means unassailable, but even its overstatements, speculations, and curious emphases are usefully challenging and provocative.

The book is composed of seven separate studies focussing on Olivier's *Henry V* and *Hamlet*, Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, versions of *Othello* by Welles and Liz White, Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Godard's *King Lear*. While there is no effort made—and no need—to link these chapters, there is an identifiable, almost formulaic consistency in Donaldson's critical approach that emerges in each. He typically cites an anecdote, usually from an autobiographical work by the director. This anecdote then becomes the reference point for a cluster of cinematic themes, gestures, and/or spatial constructions, which are analyzed primarily for their psychological—or, more precisely, psychosexual—significance. Psychological analysis does not preclude or preempt but rather leads directly into political analysis, with politics for the most part understood in terms of gender definitions, inter- and intrasexual and racial relations, and problems of power and authority. Finally, each work is examined as a metacinematic statement on the conditions of film-making, the dynamics of spectatorship, or some aspect of the cinematic apparatus.

I have abstracted this structural core from Donaldson's method not to reduce it to a simple mechanism but to outline his recurrent concerns and indicate how wide-ranging and ambitious his essays are. At his best, he provides fascinating commentaries on how certain films are remarkably complex intersections of authorial/directorial psychodynamics and memories, cultural codes and conflicts, and aesthetic conventions.

Indeed, throughout the book, Donaldson takes great pains to distance himself from simplistic psychohistory, inserting reminders that "The life does not explain the art" (146). But though we must in the last resort trust the tale, the teller is still worth listening to, and the story of his or her life often affords a useful insight into the work. Zeffirelli's reminiscences of his childhood rootlessness, possible homoerotic attachments, and deep fears about the vulnerability of the human body and fragility of love do not solve all the riddles of why he constructs his films as he does, but, as Donaldson points out, they "may foster sensitivity to aspects . . . that have received insufficient attention" (146). In this case, his *Romeo and Juliet* takes on new meaning as a fable of homosexual as well as heterosexual love. The body on display, the gaze inside and at the film, and the desires evoked are female as well as male, and the central issue at stake here is not so much some vague notion of "star-crossed lovers" but concrete dramatizations of destructive "misogyny and male fear of intimacy with other men" (153).

Kurosawa's autobiography, however, yields no psychosexual conflict but, instead, a crisis of artistic allegiance: accordingly, *Throne of Blood* embodies a clash of

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styles—flat surfaces, as in Noh drama, vs. Western perspectival frame constructions emphasizing depth of field—and the temptation to power that Washizu/Macbeth succumbs to is analogous to Kurosawa's own temptation to renounce his native cultural aesthetics for Western cinema. Liz White's life story—specifically, the fact that she is black—gives her *Othello* an authenticity that Donaldson finds extremely valuable and that allows him to use this film as a club to beat Welles's *Othello*, which, lacking this authenticity, "suppress[es] racial difference" (119)—Welles's Othello is not black enough—and ends up "caught in its own evocation of entrapment" (122). Finally, Donaldson heroically tries to decipher Godard's *King Lear* and to analyze how Godard inserts himself into the film as part of his theoretical interrogation of the ontological and political status of artists and art works. One of the side benefits of this remarkably patient and astute chapter is that it relieves us of the imperative to run out and see what Donaldson rightly calls "this controversial and in some ways certainly unsuccessful work" (219).

To note that *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* is endlessly provocative and interesting is not to suggest that it is always convincing. One can find something to disbelieve on nearly every page, not only because Donaldson has a tendency to make bold, totalizing statements but also because his often radical theoretical assumptions are mantrically invoked rather than criticially interrogated. Baudry, Metz, Mulvey, and other modern critics provide Donaldson with a set of terms, issues, and analytic narratives that are wonderfully generative and directly applicable to the films at hand but also problematic in ways that he fails to acknowledge.

But even though Donaldson may not be a consistent and reflexive theorist, and his arguments might be more persuasive if he grounded them in a more extensive methodological introduction, he is still an adept theoretical *bricoleur* and always balances his abstract observations with extensive analyses of scenic details and spatial strategies in the films. Individual readers may gravitate toward different sections of the book, but *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* has something for everyone—that is to say, something to inform and something to provoke everyone. Because of its accessibility, theoretical versatility, and precise analyses, and in spite of what a hypersensitive reader may see as its occasional trendy terminology and bows to political correctness (especially in the chapters on *Othello*), this is an extremely valuable book.

SIDNEY GOTTLIEB

▪ Sidney Gottlieb teaches film and literature at Sacred Heart University.

Issues in Feminist Film Criticism

Edited by Patricia Erens. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. $45.00 cloth; $17.50 paper.

Issues in Feminist Film Criticism is an important and meticulously edited anthology that provides an introduction to Anglo-American feminist film theory of the 1980s (with a few earlier essays included for clarification). Erens has structured the book as a "series of debates" aimed at covering a range of methods while preserving the internal tensions that increasingly defined feminist film studies in the last decade. This organization throws into relief certain dialogic patterns recurrent in recent feminist work: feminist countercinema versus feminist appropriations of popular images and mainstream forms; depictions of female subjectivity as passive or forcefully "masculinized" versus accounts stressing the division and critical resistance typical of feminist response; schemes casting the subject in the binary terms of sexual difference versus those insistent upon the interrelations of gender, race, class, age, and other social strata.

Part 1 provides a condensed overview of feminist film theory beginning with the "positive image" approach and followed by well-known essays on textual analysis and spectatorship by Pam Cook and Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, and Mary Ann Doane. The section concludes with recent essays by Tania Modleski and Jane Gaines which reassess earlier feminist theory in light of recurrent problems—particularly the notorious difficulty of theorizing female identification and desire. In "Hitchcock, Feminism, and the Patriarchal Unconscious," Modleski's analysis of the female/feminist spectator prefers anger and critical resistance to the passivity and masochism often accorded the female subject of Hitchcock's films.

Part 2, "Rereading Hollywood Films," offers the best example of the book's dialogic construction. Following contrasting feminist readings of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (by Maureen Turim and the team of Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca), Erens has selected opposed readings of *Stella Dallas* by E. Ann Kaplan and Linda Williams. Although Kaplan and Williams agree that *Stella* enables exploration of the problem of female spectatorship, their differences inspired a brief debate in *Cinema Journal*. Part 2 also contains *Issues'* only example of reception study—Elizabeth Ellsworth's "Feminist Spectators and *Personal Best*." Ellsworth's essay reinforces the book's thematic by chronicling the feminist debates that ensued upon *Personal Best*'s release as liberal, socialist, and lesbian feminist reviewers variously assessed the film's value and impact.

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Part 3, devoted to feminist aesthetics, includes essays on feminist documentary by Julia Lesage and Sonya Michel, as well as articles devoted to feminist countercinema by Annette Kuhn and Kaja Silverman. The section is rounded out with essays by B. Ruby Rich and Teresa de Lauretis, both of whom problematize the relationship between feminist film criticism and traditional aesthetics.

The final section of *Issues* is devoted to films directed by women and includes essays on Hollywood films, feminist countercinema, and documentary. Florence Jacobowitz and Lori Spring's analysis of Lee Grant's *Tell Me a Riddle* is exemplary of the feminist return to mainstream forms following frustration with the limitations of countercinema. Their essay suggests that seventies feminists may have abandoned the "positive image" approach in too wholesale a fashion. The anthology's penultimate essay, B. Ruby Rich's "Anti-Porn: Soft Issue, Hard World," uses the New York opening of *Not a Love Story* as a pretext for criticizing the antiporn movement, which caused eighties feminists to become increasingly mired in a debate that contained feminism's oppositional force and led to its frequent alliances with government and right-wing organizations. Rich's essay provides a suitable close to the anthology in that it uses a film review as the pretext for contemplating feminist problems extending beyond film studies proper. *Issues* thus suggests the importance for feminist film studies of maintaining the ties between political/activist and critical arenas.

Issues offers perhaps the best currently available introduction to feminist film theory, and yet I want to close with one qualification of its success. Although issues of race are taken up in brilliant essays by Teresa de Lauretis and Jane Gaines, the book does not include essays authored by feminists of color. This is unfortunate, since the text has clearly been designed for classroom use and since fallout from the Kinko's suit has temporarily, and perhaps permanently, blocked the coursepack option. Feminists have long been sensitive to the difficulties confronting the critic who attempts to "speak for" subcultural experiences that are not her/his own. Erens might have included essays such as those by Jacqueline Bobo and Alile Sharon Larkin anthologized in E. Deidre Pribram's recent *Female Spectators*. Eschewing such "standard" topics as the gaze and countercinema, Bobo's and Larkin's work provides a sense of dialogues and debates happening "elsewhere"; in the 1980s, it became increasingly urgent to acknowledge and strive to join these debates.

CYNTHIA ERB

▪ Cynthia Erb teaches film courses at Wayne State University.

Image As Artifact

The Historical Analysis of Film and Television

By John E. O'Connor. Melbourne, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990. $46.50.

At least since the Zapruder film of John Kennedy's assassination, moving-image documents have enjoyed a celebrated status as primary evidence in our understanding of social and political events. In 1991 the videotaping of Rodney King's beating by the Los Angeles police, the images of smart weapons approaching their targets, and public television's recounting of the American Civil War all seem to make the moving image a central document in the life of our culture. So it is timely for *Image As Artifact* to present a case for the importance of film in the study of history.

O'Connor has designed an anthology of essays to serve as a textbook for the history teacher. In addition to himself, eleven scholars, nearly all trained in and teaching academic history, contribute essays. Furthermore, one can acquire a two-hour video compilation and a 300-page study guide to accompany *Image As Artifact* and promote its use in the classroom. The package is made available through the American Historical Association. In spite of these credentials, however, the book carries the tone of the old "Is film an art?" debate. Once again the proponents of the cinema are struggling for recognition within a resistant sphere of traditional culture, this time the discipline of history.

The book establishes four "frameworks" for the incorporation of film in the study of history: "the moving image as representation of history," "the moving image as evidence of social and cultural history," "actuality footage as evidence for historical fact," and "the history of the moving image as industry and art form." Three essays appear in each category, the first two dealing with method and practice and the third addressing the mechanics of classroom application. Throughout, the book lays emphasis on the need to consider film from three perspectives: its production, content, and reception.

The first framework, the representation of history, presents the most troubling instance. An obvious point of comparison would be the similarities between the historical fiction film and the historical novel, but *Image As Artifact* sets more stringent standards for film's treatment of the past. In his essay, Daniel Leab reviews practices of the nonfiction film-maker that excite the disapproval and justify the wariness of

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O'Connor has designed an anthology of essays to serve as a textbook for the history teacher. In addition to himself, eleven scholars, nearly all trained in and teaching academic history, contribute essays. Furthermore, one can acquire a two-hour video compilation and a 300-page study guide to accompany *Image As Artifact* and promote its use in the classroom. The package is made available through the American Historical Association. In spite of these credentials, however, the book carries the tone of the old "Is film an art?" debate. Once again the proponents of the cinema are struggling for recognition within a resistant sphere of traditional culture, this time the discipline of history.

The book establishes four "frameworks" for the incorporation of film in the study of history: "the moving image as representation of history," "the moving image as evidence of social and cultural history," "actuality footage as evidence for historical fact," and "the history of the moving image as industry and art form." Three essays appear in each category, the first two dealing with method and practice and the third addressing the mechanics of classroom application. Throughout, the book lays emphasis on the need to consider film from three perspectives: its production, content, and reception.

The first framework, the representation of history, presents the most troubling instance. An obvious point of comparison would be the similarities between the historical fiction film and the historical novel, but *Image As Artifact* sets more stringent standards for film's treatment of the past. In his essay, Daniel Leab reviews practices of the nonfiction film-maker that excite the disapproval and justify the wariness of

historians. Leab cites the manipulations of Emile de Antonio in constructing his compilation film, *Point of Order* (1963), in which the film-maker did not simply condense 188 hours of Senate hearings into a 97-minute documentary, but rearranged facts in support of his thesis. Similar playing with evidence is noted in celebrated documentaries such as *The Wobblies* (1979) and *With Babies and Banners* (1978). In each case film-makers have justified a misleading treatment of material by claiming that it serves a general truth. Lynn Goldfarb, a social historian and the producer of *With Babies and Banners*, explained that during the making of the documentary "there was always a tension between what was historically accurate and what was visually best." Unfortunately the desire of film-makers to design an engaging drama frequently supersedes the respect for evidence that is a keynote of the historian's discipline. The book's emphasis on the production history and reception of a film seems justified under such circumstances. For even a sophisticated viewer cannot detect many of the distortions in a nonfiction movie without extratextual reference.

Further problems arise in the widespread documentary practice of oral testimony or interview. Personal reports of participants offer valuable evidence for the historian, but the memories of witnesses must be weighed in relation to other data. Often the charm and rapport established by witnesses in films such as *The Sorrow and the Pity, The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter,* or *Huey Long* disarm the spectator's critical judgment. If nonfiction film-makers are going to gain the respect of historians they will have to include the process of historical judgment within the work. Evaluation of contradictory evidence, the development of critical reasoning, and restraint upon rhetorical flourish will have to become part of the nonfiction cinema. For decades commentators have applauded the attention to process in film-makers like Dziga Vertov or Jean Rouch. If the cinema is to be acknowledged as a legitimate vehicle for historical representation, the processes of the historian will have to be incorporated into the work. In this regard Leab cites the recent films of historians Robert Brent Toplin (*Denmark Vesey's Rebellion*, 1982) and Daniel Walkowitz (*Molders of Troy*, 1979), who are working to establish a common practice for historians and nonfiction film-makers.

The third framework on "actuality footage" treats nonfiction film from a different perspective. In this section Robert Herzstein and John O'Connor discuss the historian's evaluation of newsreels, television news, or political campaign commercials as documents that contribute to our understanding of the past. The cinematic record can be a decisive element in the larger context of historical evidence. For example, Herzstein cites conflicting reports on Hitler's health in the closing years of World War II that are clarified by the newsreel evidence. An understanding of American political discourse in the past 30 years would have to include the election campaign on television. Herzstein and O'Connor encourage the historian so familiar with the printed record to investigate the audiovisual archives, ever wary of the potential for misrepresentation or the discovery of a vital clue in neglected outtakes.

The second and fourth frameworks discuss well-established points of intersection between the historian and film and television studies—the medium's role in the social and cultural evolution of the twentieth century as well as the history of film and television itself. Part of my interest in reading these essays by Robert Sklar, Thomas Cripps, Garth Jowett, and Janet Staiger was in having developments in my own field of study explained to an audience outside cinema studies. I felt well represented by these cogent and thoughtful commentaries. Sklar offers a distillation of evolving paradigms of culture studies for the moving image, beginning with the psychological model of Kracauer, through the aesthetic appeals of the auteurists, and on to the ideological debates focusing on Althusser. Furthermore, he notes the renewed importance of history for contemporary moving-image studies as a result of the increased availability of primary documents and the more convenient access to visual technology and materials. Cripps follows with a demonstration of how the newly available archival materials can transform our understanding of an event with a report on the troubled production history of *The Birth of a Race* (1918), an African-American response to *The Birth of a Nation*. Jowett illustrates the inadequate treatment of mass media in American history textbooks and calls on historians to reevaluate their understanding of the influential role of film and television in light of contemporary scholarship. Staiger characterizes the current generation of film historians, highlighting Douglas Gomery as well as her own work with David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. She outlines the theoretical influences on film historians and emphasizes their attention to economic forces, the technology of production, and the development of signifying practices. In addition, Staiger explores the new interest in the historical spectator and the attempt to construct a history which poses an integrated understanding of film production, the film text, and the film audience.

Image As Artifact draws a useful distinction between the various relations between image studies and the discipline of history. However, the book also suggests the reluctance of historians to deal with audio-

visual texts. The work emphasizes treating film and television in terms of production, content, and reception, and is most impressive in demonstrating the insights that can be obtained through a detailed production history. Greater difficulties arise in reporting on reception. Box-office reports, contemporary reviews, and advertising campaigns can all supplement a general concept of the spectator, but a sketchy profile seems to be the best one can obtain. O'Connor and his colleagues are judicious in recognizing the need as well as the limitations in constructing the historical spectator. The book seems more lax in treating content analysis, particularly the formal implications of sound and image. The question of content is hardly ignored, but emphasis lies strongly on extratextual material. It is indicative that *Image As Artifact* offers only two pages of images in its entire text. With the great attention scholars and publishers have given to image integrity and analysis over the past decade, this absence seems striking. However, it may prove to be the best way to win over the audience of historians who appear to be comfortable with words and suspicious of pictures.

LEGER GRINDON

▪ Leger Grindon teaches at Middlebury College in Vermont.

The Asian Film Industry

By John A. Lent. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990. $32.50 cloth; $14.95 paper.

John Lent's *The Asian Film Industry* fills an important gap in the growing literature on Asian cinema. Although brief mention has been made of the Asian film industry in publications like Anthony Slide's *The International Film Industry: A Historical Dictionary* or in books about the film industry of a specific country (such as *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, by Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie), Lent's book incorporates under one cover a discussion of this crucial, yet oft-overlooked aspect of film-making in no less than 15 Asian countries.

From the outset Lent refutes the assumption that there is one uniform "Asian" pattern of film production or distribution, or that a simplistic East/West dichotomy can be drawn. Like his previous publications on the mass communication networks of Asia, Oceania, and the Caribbean, *The Asian Film Industry* stresses the distinctive nature of these communication and entertainment systems. As if to underscore this point, the Introduction first addresses the issue of the "Diversity of Cultures and Films" and only then does it discuss "Commonalities of Asian Films."

Lent includes material gathered from 20 years of research, including over 50 firsthand interviews. He is joined in this task by three cowriters: George S. Semsel, for the section on the film industry of the P.R.C.; Keiko McDonald for Japan; and Manjunath Pendakur for India. The sheer scope of this book makes contributions from a group of writers inevitable, although this does add to an unevenness of tone in the book as a whole.

The Asian Film Industry is packed with information; the problem is accessing that information. An attempt to add a lighter, conversational tone to much of the material adds to a certain looseness of structure. In his Preface, Lent notes that he did not want to force the information into irrelevant pigeonholes and that he had experimented with, and discarded, several different outlines for the book before finally deciding on one which "combined historical and contemporary perspectives, primarily of the Asian film industries, carried out in a case-study, problem-oriented approach" (viii). What is needed, however, is not pigeonholes but a finer sifting of the information to allow individual facts to fit more clearly into a larger perspective. Statistical charts, like those found in the section on the Indian film industry, would have been helpful in summarizing the material for the reader.

Eight pages of black-and-white stills near the middle of the book do little to provide a visual counterpart to the plethora of facts presented in the written sections. The 16 stills chosen as illustrations seem somewhat arbitrary. An extensive list of references near the close of the book provides an excellent source of recent publications on the subject, many of them from relatively obscure journals. This expands on the bibliographic work presented by Lent in his earlier *Journal of Film and Video* articles entitled "Asian Cinema: A Selected International Bibliography" (Summer 1984, Summer 1985). For the nonspecialist, the inclusion of other standard texts on Asian cinema in *The Asian Film Industry* reference section would have been helpful.

One of the main difficulties of writing a book like *The Asian Film Industry* is that such a rapidly changing industry defies summation. Despite this fact, Lent and his cowriters were able to include information from up to the late 1980s in most of the sections. Some sections even introduce information about events that took place in mid-1989. Another difficulty is that the interrelationship between many of the film industries in

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The Asian Film Industry is the kind of book one can turn to repeatedly for facts about such concerns as studio organization, government regulation, and distribution channels. It provides a window onto the cinematic worlds of Asia; the view goes beyond that of films which were already well known in the West. For these reasons, it should prove useful as a supplementary text in courses on Asian cinema. What is regrettable is that it could have been a better reference book had the overviews been more carefully focussed.

LINDA C. EHRLICH

▪ Linda C. Ehrlich is Assistant Professor of Japanese and Cinema at the University of Tennessee. She has published articles on Japanese cinema in *East-West Film Journal,* the *Journal of Film and Video,* and *Japan Forum.*

Prison Pictures from Hollywood

By James Robert Parish. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991. $49.95.

Plots, critiques, casts, and credits are given for 293 theatrical and made-for-television prison films, along with roughly 100 black-and-white photo illustrations, the author's Introduction, and an index.

There are a couple of minor flaws (Billy Halop and Gabe Dell's names are confused in the caption of a Dead End Kids photo), as well as some rather puzzling entries and omissions. For instance, why weren't *The Last Gangster* and *Runaway Train* included, especially when the author does include *Sullivan's Travels*? Still, the study is basically a nice job of cataloguing and offering information on one of the most popular and interesting subgenres in the American cinema.

JAMES L. NEIBAUR

▪ James L. Neibaur is a film historian.

The Boys
The Cinematic World of Laurel and Hardy

By Scott Allen Nolen. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1989. $22.95.

Basically a pastiche of what has often been said about the team, this is closest to Charles Barr's 1967 study, although somewhat more academic. Nolen can be interesting (especially on the on-screen relationship between Laurel and Hardy), though sometimes excessive (comparing Stan to Iago because of a single line in *Tit for Tat*). Largely overlooked post-Roach features get welcome attention, though too few insights.

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Anthropological Filmmaking

Edited by Jack R. Rollwagen. New York: Harwood, 1988. $39.00.

This somewhat schizophrenic text contains essays by anthropologists on their film-making projects. Some are quite dated, some refer to uncompleted projects, many are anecdotal. The reluctance to discuss film-making within a conceptual framework may result from a reluctance to grant film autonomous status as a discourse or aesthetic form; such status is often seen as imperiling film's scientific status as objective recording medium. Several essays nevertheless offer valuable insights. Allison Jablonko, for example, provides an extremely lucid description of the process of transforming "mere footage," shot for research purposes, into the highly conventionalized and narrative structure of a television documentary. The transformations encapsulate tensions running through the entire volume: how to use film to convey an anthropological understanding to those outside the anthropological community, particularly when film theory and film form remain neglected. In his own essay, Rollwagen calls for stronger enforcement of the boundary between anthropological film and most ethnographic film-makers, who lack training as anthropologists. For Rollwagen, "sophisticated" anthropological theory provides the controlling framework for acceptable film projects. Therefore, only anthropologists can hope to make anthropologically rigorous films. The evidence from the other

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essays, however, suggests that issues of film form and audience reception have no place in existing anthropological theory. Only those who step beyond the boundary Rollwagen sets out to police begin to explore these issues fruitfully. BILL NICHOLS

▪ Bill Nichols is a visiting professor of Theatre Arts at the University of California at Santa Cruz. His most recent book is *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary.*

The Charm of Evil
The Life and Films of Terence Fisher

By Wheeler Winston Dixon. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991. $59.50.

The Films of Freddie Francis

By Wheeler Winston Dixon. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991. $37.50.

If you wonder how the horror films of your youth, say Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee in *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) or Oliver Reed in *Paranoiac* (1960), got made, who made them, and how, Wheeler Winston Dixon's studies of horror auteurs Terence Fisher and Freddie Francis, who made these two, are well worth the time. If your interest is intellectually upscale and you need to know that feminist critics have found a firmly fixed "male gaze" (usually focussed on a nubile squirming young blond woman) and, alas, a corresponding castration anxiety at the core of these films, Professor Dixon's works are as scholarly as they are readable. In addition, if the workings of the film industry itself, in this case the British quickie mill Hammer Films, is your interest, Dixon explains how both directors managed to create a body of work that expressed a point of view and gained a cult following.

Dixon's book on Fisher is complete with notes, filmography, and plot summaries which read like mysteries. His work on the still active Francis, consisting of long interviews, is notably shorter and offers the additional appeal of Francis's work as a director of photography, for which he won two Academy Awards, most recently for *Glory* (1989). JOSEPH J. LIGGERA

▪ Joseph J. Liggera is in the English Department at Bridgewater State College. He teaches and has written on film.

The Comics Come Alive
A Guide to Comic Strip Characters in Live-Action Productions

By Roy Kinnard. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991. $32.50.

This reference lists filmographies and summaries of films based on comic strip characters from biggies like Batman, Blondie, Dick Tracy, and Flash Gordon to fun trivial stuff like Blackhawk, Archie, and Radio Patrol. The author's Introduction gives a brief history of the comic strip's evolution to the comic book and eventual branching off into other areas, including motion pictures. The book wraps up with a section on Miscellaneous Entries listing TV specials dealing with comic strips and a complete Index of names and titles. JAMES L. NEIBAUR

▪ James L. Neibaur is a film historian.

Tap! The Greatest Tap Dance Stars and Their Stories 1900-1955.

By Rusty E. Frank. New York: William Morrow, 1990. $39.95.

It's unfortunate that this enthusiastic collection of 30 interviews, mainly of dancers holding film credits, was saddled with such a subtitle. A sense of the past does in fact emerge from all the reminiscence, although Frank, a dancer herself, limited her subjects to the living. That excluded subject headings like Bill Robinson and even Sammy Davis, Jr., except for others' memories. Nevertheless, Shirley Temple and not Honi Coles? Jane Withers and not Chuck Green?

The book is reinforced with a glossary, a list of dancers and their acts (where's Will Gaines?), a filmography (*After Seven* should be *After Seben*), a discography, and a list of films and videos (Paul Laing's *Masters of Tap* is missing). And I'd never before realized that young tap dancers sometimes studied steps by slowing down the phonograph records made by other dancers, just as pianists once learned their trade with the aid of pianola rolls. JOHN FELL

▪ John Fell is the author of *Film and the Narrative Tradition.*

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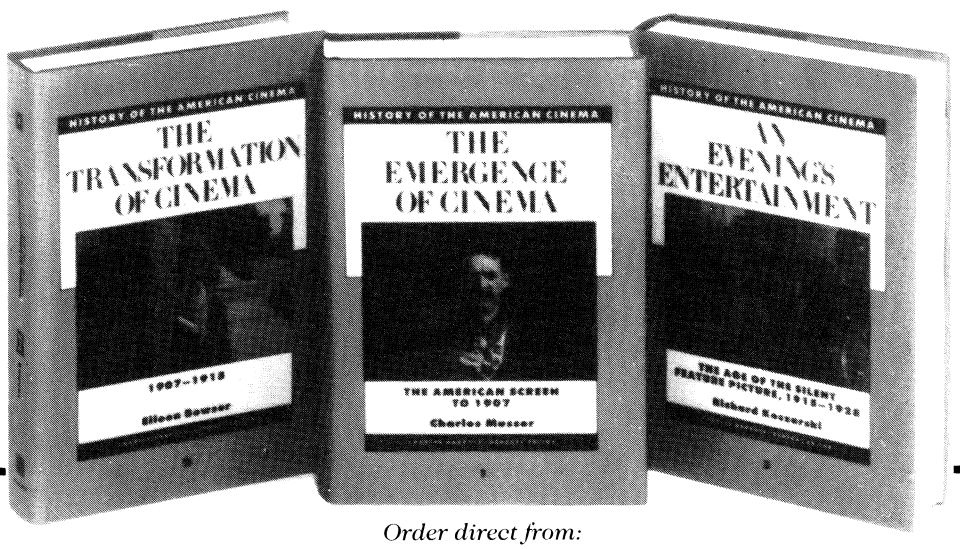

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